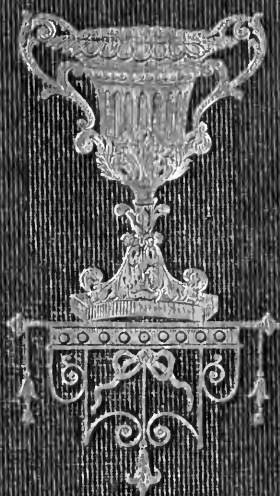


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THE
LIFE, CHARACTER, AND GENIUS
OF
Ebenezer Elliott.



George Searle Phillips

MEMOIRS

OF

EBENEZER ELLIOTT,

The Corn Law Rhymmer,

WITH

CRITICISMS UPON HIS WRITINGS.

BY JANUARY SEARLE. *prend.*

LONDON :

WHITTAKER & CO., AVE-MARIA LANE;
AND J. BROOK, HUDDERSFIELD.

1852.

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TO

THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF CARLISLE,

IN SINCERE ADMIRATION OF

HIS LORDSHIP'S EMINENT TALENTS, HIS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE VIRTUES,

AND HIS LARGE POPULAR SYMPATHIES,

This humble Volume is with permission Dedicated,

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S

MOST FAITHFUL AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E .

ON the appearance of the first edition of this work, or that part of it, rather, which is properly mine, I was accused by some of Elliott's friends of doing him an injustice in saying that he never fully appreciated Wordsworth as a poet. But upon mature consideration, I am inclined to stand by that statement. I know well enough that numerous passages from the letters and prose writings of Elliott might be adduced to show that he held Wordsworth in high estimation, and he is credited to this extent in my analysis of his genius and writings. What he did not appreciate, however, was what Wordsworth most valued in the judgment of his readers, namely, the spirituality with which he endeavoured to invest external nature, and the life of man. And this endeavour, which lies at the root of all Wordsworth's writings, Elliott had little or no sympathy with. In the conclusion of his Autobiography he says: "My mind is the mind of my eyes;" and it could not

have been better characterized. Wordsworth's mind made his eyes ; and here lies the grand distinction between the two poets.

In conclusion, I have to return thanks to all who have helped me in this volume ; especially to my friend Thomas Lister of Barnsley ; and, if it were possible for my thanks to reach him, to my poor dead correspondent, Paul Rodgers of Sheffield : *Requiescat in pace !*

HUDDERSFIELD,

December 1st, 1851.

LIFE, CHARACTER, AND GENIUS
OF
EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

PART I.

REVIEW OF EBENEZER ELLIOTT'S MIND AND WRITINGS.

I HAVE to speak in this paper upon the genius and character of Ebenezer Elliott, whose stormy life is now ended, and whose great musical heart lies still and silent in the grave. And although, if I consulted my own feelings, the love which I bore the departed poet would prompt me to write a threnody over his ashes, rather than a cool analysis of his mind and

writings, yet I will endeavour to merge all private sympathies in this discourse, and treat my subject in a catholic spirit, from the historical point of view alone.

Fortunately, the materials for this work are near at hand; and the poet has not been long enough dead to have passed into the perplexing regions either of mythology or tradition. Indeed it was but yesterday that I conversed with him in his own house, heard him read his own poems, and joined with his fair daughters in singing the beautiful melodies which, at their request, he wrote and adapted to some of our most popular airs. And when I think of the good and brave old man—with his venerable grey hairs—his kind eyes, now beaming with love, and now flashing with indignant fire, as he spoke of human wrong and misery—I can scarcely reconcile myself to the idea that he is gone for ever from the world. The stern truth, however, returns to me with solemn emphasis, in spite of my incredulity, and I know but too surely, that I shall see him no more. It is, nevertheless, a high consolation to look back upon the noble and manly life which he lived; for he was an exemplar worthy, in many important

particulars, to be imitated and revered. He was no half-and-half man, wavering with doubtful indecision between two opinions, but an earnest and sincere, if not a complete and many-sided character. It was his way throughout life, first of all to master every subject that interested him, and then heroically, and without calculating the chances of defeat, or caring for the world's sanction or opposition, to throw himself into the arena as its champion. Like the warriors of the old chivalry, wherever he appeared he left the marks of his battle-axe behind him. Indeed, Nature seems to have cast him in such sharp and decisive moulds that she might be sure of her man, and secure herself from all counterfeits of him. It is at all events certain, that while the mannerism of every other considerable poet has been seized upon by verse-wrights, and persons of that ilk, and passed into the general currency of literature, Elliott is the only bard whose genius has not been corrupted by these base coiners. Looking at him through his writings, he reminds me of some grim Cyclop, into whose body a divine soul has passed, radiating him with glory, and making even his deformities beautiful. For he is not

dressed in the ordinary costume of the bards, having his garland and singing robes around him—such as Spencer and Milton wore—but he appears in the naked buff of a hard-working man—grimed with soot and sweat, and singing of the “accursed Bread Tax,”—made manifest to him as such, in the empty trenchers of his famished children! We must not look, therefore, in his pages for that external polish and courtly bearing which characterise the highest nobility of the poetic order; for there is nothing which he so little professes. And yet he is not without polish, but, on the contrary, he sometimes surprises us with delicate touches, and even with whole pictures, finished in the best style of art. The secret of this rude demeanour—this bandying of coarse names and crooked epithets, which are so common in his writings, lies primarily in the earnestness of his nature, and, in a secondary sense, in that lack of early culture which he sets forth so prominently in his autobiography. It is this rugged, fiery, and impetuous utterance, however, which gives the main charm to his poetry, and makes it, like Luther’s speech, a continual battle. I, for one, do not wish to see these scars and trenches

erased from his writings. They are the birth-pangs of his spirit, as it burst forth, with mighty upheavings, from its dumb sepulchre, and arose triumphant into life and melody.

In his later writings he evinces more mastery over his imagination and feelings than in most of his earlier productions, but his wild spirit was never entirely tamed; and the spots and claws of the leopard are everywhere visible in his pages. Few men, however, have proved themselves greater masters than he of the secrets of rhythmical science. Many of his poems are executed with consummate skill; and his descriptive passages are so true, natural, and beautiful, that they can scarcely be surpassed by any similar efforts in the language. He excels most in this kind of writing—because he is always at home with Nature—and loves her like a mother, with a gentle, confiding, and most affectionate heart. But no sooner do the dark aspects of humanity—the wrongs, the follies, the pride, and the crimes of men pass over his mind, than he bursts forth into passionate and vehement exclamation, and the calm heavens, and the meek and beautiful earth, are suddenly darkened and

distorted with the fiery ashes of his wrath. We see in all that he does a strong man; a sort of gigantic Titan, who hates his chains; in whom the Divine impulses are so powerful that he must speak, even if it be in flame; for although he has a wonderful faculty of condensation—both in thought and matter—yet he rarely evinces that subdued power, that central balance and equipoise, which are the highest marks of greatness. He knows nothing of the deep repose, the sorrowful strength, which is manifested in Wordsworth; nor did he ever fully appreciate the writings of that noble and philosophical bard. He mistook in several instances the artistic simplicity, and the pure Greek beauty, of Wordsworth, for sheer weakness, and thought very meanly of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets. He allowed that there was merit in the “Peter Bell,” but gave his praise grudgingly, like one who was half ashamed of his judgment. He had no sympathy with those high speculations which are for ever haunting the mind of Wordsworth, and are so beautifully embodied in his poetry. He was a far-seeing, much-enduring, hard-working, practical man; dealing always with practical questions, and

rarely attempting to soar into the higher regions of thought. Whatever was tinged with mysticism, and did not represent some tangible matter, which he could grasp and wrestle with, was to him idle and empty dreaming. He was cradled into poetry by human wrong and misery, and was emphatically, the Bard of Poverty—singing of the poor man's loves and sorrows, and denouncing his oppressors. This he conceived to be his mission; and whilst the Corn Laws existed, and Labour and Famine went hand in hand together, he had no time for the dainty speculations of philosophy, even if he had possessed the capacity for them. His mind, however, was not metaphysical; but, as I said, practical; and his want of relish for Wordsworth as a whole, lay in the necessity of his intellect.

I remember reading to him, after a long conversation upon the relative merits of Wordsworth and Byron, the fine ode of the former poet, called, "Intimations of Immortality, gathered from Recollections of Early Childhood;" but notwithstanding the profound significance, and deep anthem-melody of the poem, he would not acknowledge its merit.—Nay, he confessed that it

was beyond his depth, although he afterwards quoted one or two fine lines, which had struck him during the reading, and seemed to haunt him in spite of himself.— This poem, which may be called the Apotheosis of life, and is in every respect a wonderful performance, both in spirit, compass, and execution, is the test by which one might measure the depth and culture of all candidates for honours in the Poetical Tripos. And as some one has said — I believe Berkeley—that unless a man have doubted the fact of his own existence, he may be sure he has no aptitude for metaphysics, so it may likewise be said, that he who cannot understand the moral fitness and spiritual aim of the ode in question, has no claim to be admitted into the highest regions of poetical inspiration. The truth of this postulate is borne out, so far as Elliott is concerned, both in his public writings and private discourse. The fine Platonism of the ode alluded to, finds no echo in his heart; the shadowy recollections, as of a dim and forgotten existence, which flit over the golden brain of childhood, and which to Wordsworth are evidences of an old, dateless, and eternal birth, and which,

———"be they what they may,
Are still the common light of all our day;
Are still the fountain light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the Eternal Silence;"—

these recollections, I say, suggest no such deep thoughts and high emprises to the mind of Elliott, but have a psychological base, and may be psychologically explained. He looked, in fact, for a literal meaning in the ode, and missed, therefore, the whole grandeur and sublimity of its aim. "For what purpose," said he, "should the soul return again to earth, after it has once left it? Is life, then, and such a life as this famine-life of England, so loveable?" The question is a key to Elliott's mind, and we can see very well how many, and what kind of chambers in the Spiritual kingdom, it will unlock. I find the same practical and obstinate question occurring in one of his latest poems, the "Plaint," written, as he told me, one night to withdraw his mind from the pain and agony of his bodily suffering. This "Plaint," which is the most mystical of all his poems, is pitched in the same key-note as the "Silent Land," by Salis,

and is wonderfully beautiful and striking. It is the sorrowful wail of a soul wandering in the dark, on the very margin of the eternal shores; companioned by millions, and yet going all alone, into the dark, silent, dread, Unknown. I know of nothing so sad and melancholy in literature; and the gloomy, almost heart-breaking effect of the poem is heightened by the dreary melody of the rhythm, and the skill whereby the main idea of one verse is repeated in the next, and merged into some new and still more mournful thought. The question to which I have alluded will be found in the sixth verse of this poem, where the desire for the re-union of the soul, either with the world or with its ex-tenants in the immortal spheres, is regarded as selfish and profane, because God is all. Here is the poem:—

PLAINT.

I.

“ DARK, deep, and cold, the current flows,
Unto the sea where no wind blows,
Seeking the land which no one knows.

II.

O'er its sad gloom still comes and goes,
The mingled wail of friends and foes,
Borne to the land which no one knows.

III.

Why shrieks for help you wretch who goes,
With millions, from a world of woes,
Unto the land which no one knows ?

IV.

Though myriads go with him who goes,
Alone he goes, where no wind blows,
Unto the land which no one knows.

V.

For all must go where no wind blows,
And none can go for him who goes ;
None, none return, whence no one knows.

VI.

Yet why should he who shrieking goes
With millions, from a world of woes,
Re-union seek with it or those ?

VII.

Alone with God, where no wind blows,
And Death, His shadow, doom'd he goes,
That God is there the shadow shows.

VIII.

Oh ! shoreless Deep ! where no wind blows !
And thou, oh Land, which no one knows !
That God is All, His shadow shows."

Still, although Elliott could not penetrate the deep allusions of Wordsworth, nor appreciate his philosophy, he held the Bard in great reverence, and spoke of the "Excursion"

as one of the poems destined for immortality. He could quote all its finest descriptive passages; and regarded many of Wordsworth's Minor Effusions, as pieces of pure nature. His love for Southey, "who condescended," as he says, "to teach him the art of poetry," was sincere, natural, and characteristic. For Elliott was a worshipper of *power* and *beauty* and delighted in the architectural pomp of poetry, where he could sit as in a vast cathedral, and contemplate the gorgeous creations of genius upon its painted domes. Hence he spoke of "Thalaba" as the most wonderful effort of the human imagination, and more than one of his pieces is stained with the fiery colouring of that cabalistic poem. His admiration of Byron amounted almost to idolatry; and he was impatient of all dissent from his judgment in this particular. Neither would he allow you to differ from him, unless you could at once substantiate your opinion by a direct reference to the poet's writings. Nor was it easy to convince him that there was a single flaw in the rhetoric or sentiments of his noble idol. He would not admit that he was irreligious or immoral in his writings; and denounced all such judgment as "cant, twaddle, and hypocrisy." "It has become

fashionable," he said, "to abuse Lord Byron, but he will live when the bones of his blasphemers shall have rotted." And then, after he had exhausted the fierce tornadoes of his wrath against all such blasphemers, he would quote you endless passages from this poet, all of them full of human beauty, and breathing a fine spirit of natural piety. He had a rich and costly edition of "Childe Harold"—illustrated, if I remember rightly, by Turner—which he cherished with an almost holy love; for he declared this poem to be the finest master-piece of melody which our noble English tongue can boast of. Shelley and Keats were likewise great favourites with him. The former he loved not only for his genius, but for his deep sympathy with his race; and the latter he estimated more highly than any modern poet, with the exception of Byron; not so much from what he had actually accomplished, as for the promise which his performances manifested. In these likings and estimates of the genius of his contemporaries, we see the objective tendency of his mind, and its delight in sensuous, rather than in spiritual beauty and speculative thought.

I think, therefore, from these consider-

ations, and others to be shown hereafter, that Elliott can scarcely be classed amongst the highest order of poetical minds. And yet he belongs to the "true breed of the vermin," as he himself expressed it in speaking of a much humbler person. For in his writings are to be found all the elements of a beautiful and æsthetic, as well as of a grand moral poetry. And it is precisely in the æsthetic and moral sphere, as distinguished from the spiritual, that he takes his place as a poet; looking upon all things through the medium of the beautiful, in their relation to the moral laws. There is something Hebraic and sublime in the stern justice which he executes upon falsehood and wrong-doing. He is like the Indian impersonation of Brahm—all eyes, all ears, all feet—keen to see, powerful to perform, swift to overtake. He has one central idea—terrible and awful in its aspect, although beautiful and beneficent in its spirit—before which he tries all causes, and men, and things. It is the Eternal Idea of Right; his synonyme of God. And this idea is perpetually present in his mind, pervades all his thoughts, will not be shuffled nor cheated, but demands a full satisfaction from all violators of it. The

Titled Scoundrel, and the Mitred Priest, the Bread-Tax-Eater, the Fox-Hunter, the Game-Law-Squire, the Hundred Popes of England's Jesuitry, are all summoned before this tribunal, and dealt with—sometimes with an over-severe judgment. One can make allowance, however, for the occasional exaggeration of the sentence, because the doom of his delinquents is always just. Besides, a man whose feelings, as he says, “have been *hammered* until they have become *cold-short*, and are apt to snap and fly off in sarcasms,” is not likely to be choice in his expressions, when he is dealing with known lies; nor have they any mercy to expect at his hands. For poetry, with Elliott, was no pastime, nor even a musical unrest, but a stern and inspired demonic labour, deep as life, strong as death; involving life, or death issues. He had a great contempt for dilettante poetry, and could pardon nothing short of genius; and even then, genius must be married to practical endeavour, or God had thrown away his highest gift upon an indolent dreamer. “We cannot spare one true man from the ranks of thought and progress, in these distracted times,” he said; “and it grieves me to see any man waste

his talents in constructing cobwebs, when the world has to be built anew." For he looked upon the world as altogether diseased; right and wrong had changed places in it, and the divine was undermost. A hireling church, and a do-nothing, eat-every-thing Aristocracy, were his nightmare of this moral death; and he devoted all his powers to crush it. The waving corn fields, and the sweet-singing birds, piping their rich melodies in the trees and hedge-rows around him, made him sad. "God has given us food to eat, and man, the tyrant and oppressor, has taxed it!" he one day exclaimed, as I wandered with him, in the valley below his house, "and these beautiful birds are singing as if there were no sorrow in the world. Ye break my heart, ye little birds," he added, turning with his eyes brimful of tears, to the unconscious musicians. It was a touching sight; for Elliott was then grey, and bowed down with the weight of years and affliction. He could not find one pure, unmixed pleasure in all the landscapes, woodlands, and cloudlands of Nature; for this divine harmony which he saw every where around him, became, as I said, sad and painful when contrasted, as by the very

law of his mind it was sure to be, with the wretchedness and misery of men. For the Poet had looked upon Nature in so many and such various moods, that all her phenomena and forms were transfigured by the power of his feelings and passions, and had become to him the symbols and the representatives of human thought and life. Nature and man's life were fused indeed into one great whole, and in the midst of sunshine, and waters, and singing birds, he heard the wild wail of famine, and the shrieks and moans of bleeding and broken hearts. Nay, he took a strange and unwearied pleasure in drawing pictures of woe and misery, and making them speak in a language that melts all hearts. We may thank Crabbe for much of this, and for the gloomy colouring which darkens the genius of our manful and earnest poet. Crabbe was his model in early life, and confirmed the natural bias of his mind towards those dark and doleful subjects. All his heroes are unhappy; the victims of social wrong and Corn Law oppression. He regarded Poverty as the waste and flaming Sahara of Life, where no flowers grew, no rain descended, no stars shone. It

was his extremest, deepest hell ; and he peopled it with horror and despair. On the other hand, outward prosperity and a "Home of Taste," for the working man, were his highest visions of a terrestrial Paradise. These were the two Poles of his ethical and political science. He could not understand that Poverty was no evil ; that it might be a great good ; capable of yielding priceless blessings : he called it an unmitigable curse. For he looked at it with the eyes of a Political Economist, and could not, or would not, entertain it as a question of morals. From a very sufficient trial of poverty, however, I can pronounce it good for discipline, consolation, guidance, strength ; a very Hercules' cradle ; and not at all, therefore, a curse, but a blessing ; provided always that a trustful and hopeful heart be at the bottom of it. But Elliott could not see the Angel through this disguise of rags ; and his professed business was to denounce it as a loathsome harlot ; the mother of crime and infamy. As a politician, he was stone-blind to the moral uses of suffering ; and neither the public history of nations, nor the private lives of great men, who had been tried and purified in that fire, could instruct him in

the wisdom of the Institution, or induce him to regard it as a divine appointment. Free trade was his religion, and heaven was paved with cheap bread, and rich mosaics of golden untaxed grain. From the altar of this enthusiasm he preached his new gospel of commerce, which was to emancipate the world from tyranny and superstition, and regenerate the lives and ways of men. It is curious and instructive to observe the strong faith which he has in the power and consequences of this material reform; what impossible things he expects from it! and how earnestly he believes the demon that possesses him, and speaks through his tongue. Had he been born a little earlier, he would have been a leader in the Commonwealth—perhaps a Puritan preacher, a regicide, and Poet Laureate to the Lord Protector. He would have fought well too, at Marston Moor, if one may judge from the battle-music which rings through his verses. But as a divine guide, and teacher of heavenly things, he has no faculty, and therefore no mission. He is a poet, but not a priest; and one always feels dark and lonely with him, except when he goes forth to worship on the hill tops. The beautiful

and sorrowful stars instruct us in a holier lore than that of Corn Law Rhymes, and anti-Corn Law curses; and the poet himself is never so human, natural, and happy, as when singing the songs which they inspire. His thoughts and ways are his own, however—the proper and necessary unfolding of his nature, and should be received and accepted as such.

The philosophy of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham was the substratum upon which his mind was built; and this philosophy, interpenetrated by his genius, found at last a voice which burst forth in Corn Law Rhymes. It was the first melody that ever came from the dead and monotonous mill-wheels of political economy, and is the best result which I, for one, can hope for from that quarter. The works of the above authors, and those of the good Colonel Thompson, made Elliott a politician; and he no sooner saw the evil effects of the Corn Laws upon the industry of the nation, than he began to denounce them. Unfortunately, his hatred of monopoly made him a monopolist in his hatred, limited his vision, dwarfed his sympathies, and converted him into a kind of Polyphemus—a one-eyed King of Song.

The Corn Laws were at the root of all our evils; social, moral, political, and religious. Destroy these laws, and you will have free trade, and with it a happy, contented, and virtuous population! Such was the remedy which the Poet proposed for the deep spiritual disease of the nation.

His insight did not extend beyond the cuticle of the world; and all its spiritual wants and necessities were as impenetrably hidden from his eyes as if they had been closed by the seven seals spoken of in the Apocalypse. But no man living in his time had a clearer practical vision, or a more ready and seasonable wit. He always struck at the right moment, whilst the iron was hot, and sent the hissing and burning sparks around him, with good effect. And thus, whether speaking at public meetings, lecturing at mechanics' institutes, or writing political lyrics, he was always successful.

His early poems are remarkable for rude power, and for a wild and somewhat turgid imagination. They remind me of the *Voluspa*, and the *Prose Edda* of the Scandinavians, where the Norse genius revels in unrestrained license, and conjures its gigantic creations out of the tempest and the whirlwind, and

the ghostly regions of eternal ice and snow. We see that the wild Eagle has not yet acquired the mastery over its wings; although in all its heavenward attempts there is much of glory, if also of defeat. It is extremely interesting to trace the progress of the poet's mind from his first effort, "The Vernal Walk," made in his seventeenth year, up to the publication of the "Ranter" and the "Corn Law Rhymes." He gathers fresh strength at every step, and beats up the thunder from the hard highway as he marches along, giving us assurance that an earnest fighting man is on the road, who means, by the grace of God, to become a hero and a conqueror. Unfortunately, he is too often a Quixotic spendthrift of his power: and, although he does not fight windmills, he often grinds in them—like blind Sampson—and that too, with no practical result, but merely to shake off the superabundance of his strength. I have read the "Vernal Walk" with pleasure, as a literary curiosity; and with the same feelings which induce us to look into the early literature of great nations. It is very singular too, the striking resemblance in the development of ideas which exists between

the youth of man, and the youth of nations. Wonder and worship are the elements of human culture, and religion flows naturally out of the loving heart, in the presence of Nature. Hence all great nations have their theogonies and theosophies, whose origin lies in the very morning of their existence; and hence also the earliest efforts of our best poets have a religious source. Elliott's "Vernal Walk," originally published by Mr. Fowler, of Cambridge, is full of this devotional feeling, and is moreover no inconsiderable performance, in the literary sense, if we take into the account his neglected education, and the age at which it was written. I fancy also that I can discover in this poem the seeds of the future man, his love of Nature, his worship of the beautiful, his earnestness, strength, and weakness. The same fusion of human sorrow with natural beauty, which marks all he does in after years, is likewise visible here. It is, however, an imitative and reminiscent, rather than an inspired poem; and he apologises for including it in his collected works by saying, that as the idiot of the family is sometimes a favourite, so this poem is endeared to him by the critical

persecution which it has suffered. I subjoin a few extracts, which will give some idea of this earliest effusion of the poet:—

“ Hark ! ’tis the hymn of Nature ! Love-taught birds
 Salute, with songs of gratulation sweet,
 The sweet May morning. How harmoniously
 Over these meadows of the rising sun
 The music floats ! O Love ! Love ever young !
 On the soft bosom of the Spring reclined ;
 Nurse of the tender thought, and generous deed !
 Thou comest to bless thy children. * *
 Oft have I passed yon cottage door at eve,
 Where sat the swain, his daily labour done,
 Nursing his little children on his knee,
 And kissing them at times, whilst o’er him bent
 His happy partner, smiling as she viewed
 Her lisping babes ; then have I blessed thee, Love !
 And fondly called thee Fount of Social Peace !
 What art thou, deathless, all-pervading power,
 That, like a meek, yet universal sun,
 Through universal Nature gently shinest ?
 Art thou a ray from light’s unclouded source ?
 An emanation of divinity ?
 No ; thou art God ! ”

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“ Here springs the odorous primrose ; sweetly here
 The orchard blooms ; here bees are full of Spring.
 The poet courts the violet as he strays ;
 But Winter cometh, and the flower is gone ;
 And then saith he, ‘ ’Tis faded.’ Thus, O Man !

Thou livest, and diest! Strong is thy youthful frame,
 But soon the feeble steps of Age approach,
 Follow'd by Death. Even on thy new-made grave
 Oblivion sits———”

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———“ Ere there lived one soul
 To worship thee, Oh God of Holiness!
 Wrapt in incomprehensibility,
 Pleased with self-contemplation, thou didst muse
 In silence on thine own eternal thoughts.
 Through all extent thou piercest; nothing is
 Where thou art not: even in me thou dwellest,
 Thou movest the strings of mental melody
 Which tune my soul to harmony and love.
 Thou bidd'st my fancy soar to realms of light,
 Bidd'st reason, holy reason, muse on thee
 And in thy works behold thee, throned o'er heights
 And depths of glory inaccessible.
 I, in the majesty of Nature, see
 The greatness of eternal majesty;
 I, in her smiling scenery, behold
 The bounteous smile of beauty infinite.
 Thy goodness is unbounded, God of Love!
 Here, or wherever uncreated light
 Flames in the sea of ever-vital beams,
 World peopled—as this vernal air with birds—
 Father and God! thy sons shall worship thee!”

But notwithstanding that these early effusions are rudely and coarsely constructed,

there are gleams of real talent in them, and touches of that deep pathos whereof Elliott has since proved himself so great a master. The Rejected's Song in "The Second Nuptials" may be instanced as a specimen of his early skill in this department of poetry.

At a very early period of his poetical career, Elliott was fortunate enough to secure the friendship of the poet Southey; who, on the appearance of his second volume, which originally comprised "Bothwell,"—a dramatic poem, "The Exile," and "Second Nuptials," with a Preface from "Peter Faultless to his brother Simon,"—defying his reviewers—wrote him as follows: "There is power in the least of these tales; but the higher you pitch your tone the better you succeed. Thirty years ago they would have made your reputation; and thirty years hence, the world will wonder that they did not do so." Elliott's third volume contained a satire, under the title of "Giaour," which, strange enough, was a vehement attack upon Lord Byron. The secret of its history is one of the many curiosities of literature. According to Elliott's own statement, it was written

with a view to goad Lord Byron into a notice of him; and to revenge himself for an affront which he fancied he had received from the noble lord, in the old Bank at Rotherham. The party who relates this story, thinks it should receive but a qualified credence. There seems, however, to be no reason to doubt its accuracy—since the original statement was made by Elliott himself; and I have frequently remarked, that he was not only candid in the announcement, but severe in the condemnation of his own failings. It is, moreover, easy enough to see how a young and sensitive man—conscious of his own unacknowledged merits, might be entrapped by the impetuosity of his feelings, into an ungenerous revenge of a supposed insult. Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" is an example of this headstrong retaliation; and Elliott could very well plead it as a precedent, if not as a justification. But in neither instance must we draw too hasty conclusions, from these erratic outbursts; for they are no true indications of the character of either party. In both cases it is wounded pride that speaks, and not a corrupt and revengeful

heart. I do not seek, however, to apologise for Elliott's conduct in this instance; and will merely add that Lord Byron took no notice of his assailant.

"Corn Law Rhymes and the Ranter" appeared next, in one volume, and were noticed in the "Eclectic," and in "Blackwood's Magazine." In 1829, he published the "Village Patriarch," which was praised by the "Westminster," but did not bring him the suffrage and applause of the public. He owes the celebrity which he soon after acquired, to an accidental visit which Dr. Bowring paid to T. A. Ward, Esq., of Sheffield. This gentleman placed a copy of the "Corn Law Rhymes, &c.," in the hands of the Doctor—who was immediately struck with the great merit of the Poet, and was subsequently introduced to him by Mr. Ward. In returning to London, Dr. Bowring visited William Howitt, at Nottingham, where he met Wordsworth, and made them acquainted with the "wonderful poet of Sheffield, not Montgomery, but a new name." Mr. Howitt claims to have directed Southey's attention to Elliott, through Wordsworth; but this is an error, for Elliott had already been known to Southey for ten

or eleven years. In London, Dr. Bowring showed Elliott's poems to Bulwer, who introduced them to the public in an anonymous letter in the "New Monthly Magazine." It is dated March 19th, 1831, and is entitled "A Letter to Dr. Southey, &c., Poet-Laureate, respecting a remarkable poem by a Mechanic." Bulwer concludes his letter thus: "And now I think you will admit that I am borne out in the praises with which I have prefaced this poem. I do not know whether the author be young, or old; if the former, I must unaffectedly add, that to my judgment, he has given such a promise as few men, even in this age—an age wronged and unappreciated—would be capable of performing."

This friendly notice may be regarded as the culminating point in Elliott's poetical career; for from this time his fame spread over the land, and his merit was generally acknowledged. Miss Jewsbury, in the "Athenæum," Mrs. Hofland, in the "New Monthly," and various other writers, hastened to pay him homage; and Thomas Carlyle wrote a genial criticism upon his writings, in the "Edinburgh Review." In 1833, '34, and '35, he collected and published

his poems in three successive volumes, and in 1840, the previous editions being exhausted, he published the whole of his works in one volume, through Tait, of Edinburgh. His later poems have since been published in two volumes, by Fox, London, under the title of "More Verse and Prose," by the Corn Law Rhymers.

I do not propose to enter into a critical analysis of these works, in their separate character; but I may make a few short remarks upon them by way of illustrating the genius and limits of the writer. It is singular enough, as I said awhile ago, that his tales are all sad, and his heroes unhappy. He had studied the physiology and anatomy of human misery, and was its poetical demonstrator. Every painful throb, and every agony of the heart, was familiar to his ear, and he reproduced them in melodies which drop down into the soul like the tears of Music. He loves the cypress and the yew; and the gloomy aisles of death and the grave. I have before alluded to his powers of pathos; and it is strange how such tenderness, pity, and deep womanly love, should be united to so much rugged manliness, sternness,

fierceness, and valour, as met together in his noble and hospitable nature. It was this mixture of opposing elements, however, which gave strength, beauty, and consistency, to his character; and although his curses and his hatred were so violent, that he exhausted all the capabilities of language in his utterance of them—yet there was nothing low or vulgar in all this, and looked at from the true point of vision it was even grand and prophetic,—like the half savage, half archangelic denunciations of the old Hebrew seers. For this hate sprang from love; from the inmost depths of a heart that vibrated with sympathies for all that was high and dear to man. Hence an act of oppression done to the meanest creature, was done to him; and as if he had been God's deputy on earth, he seized his thunderbolts, and hurled them flaming upon the head of the aggressor. He pleads for the poor, because they have no one else to plead for them; and it is most beautiful and touching to see him kneeling before the Maker of all the worlds, and imploring heavenly justice at his hands, for these wronged and suffering children. He is blamed for writing political

poetry, and his most friendly critics—Carlyle amongst the number—admonished him of the fleeting nature of such effusions. But politics were his element—the motive and the cue for all his actions and literary achievements. His mission, indeed, from the beginning to the end of his life, was that of a reformer—chiefly in the political sphere; and he clothed his message in the forms of poetry, and the robes of song, that he might render it attractive and successful. In later ages his poetry will mark the history of his time; for it is the embodiment of the wrongs and sufferings of the people, and of that “bloodless revolution” which has just terminated in commercial freedom. He has reflected, likewise, in his verse all the great political movements of the age; and we see there, in shadowy outline, the mighty pageantry of Europe as it passed in blood and fire before the eyes of men in 1848 and ’49. Nothing escapes him connected with these external movements; for he is deeply and personally interested, not only as a poet, but as a man, in all these outward and human concerns. His genius, however, is not universal, but limited. He has but one die in his mint wherewith he

stamps all his issues. He does not, like Shakspeare, give us endless types of character, but reproduces himself in his poems, as Byron did before him. His sympathies are deep and extensive; but they are all of one class. His very love is sorrow. He cannot laugh at any time, without weeping. He has wrung from knowledge its deepest lesson, and finds it bitter as blood. His teaching is all hopeless, save in one direction, and that in the lowest of all directions—namely, the political. He lacked faith and spiritual insight, and could not harmonize the distracting elements of the human world; nor contemplate them aloof from their present and practical bearings. The world disturbed him too much, and he was too much of a man to be a philosopher in it. His poetry was not art—although he was an artist—but impulse and passion. He did not, like Goëthe, study men and things, nor pass through all the grades of animal, intellectual, and spiritual experience, for literary purposes, or for his development as a complete man;—he had no such ice in his nature; he was all fervour and fire, and he loved the world too well to make experiments upon it for artistic purposes.

There is a moral in his politics, and a moral even in his most trifling effusions; and whilst he spares not the classes above him in social rank, neither does he spare those of his own order. A knave is as infamous to him in a fustian jacket as in an ermine robe.

I have said that Crabbe was the Poet who first formed his style of writing, and determined the natural tendency of his mind to sorrowful themes. He followed Crabbe, likewise, in the structure of his tales, although he is immeasurably superior to him in imagination, diction, and melody. "The Exile," dedicated to Bulwer, is after this model, but deeper in its feeling than anything to be found in Crabbe, and incomparably more powerful. So, likewise, the poem called "The Letter," is of that household character which Crabbe loved to delineate. This is a beautiful, simple, touching, and domestic tragedy; a common tale of common occurrence. It is managed throughout with great skill; and contains passages of real and marvellous beauty. Both these poems are examples of the power of genius to exalt human passion and human misery, and invest them with

enduring interest. His picture of the maiden Anna, prior to her marriage and desertion, is one of the sweetest in poetry; and he ransacks all the charms of nature wherewith to clothe her virgin beauty. Indeed, whenever he speaks of woman, his words melt into music; and violets and all sweet flowers spring up and blossom around him, as if by enchantment. The poem which he calls "Love," is almost an Anthem; and would be worthy to be celebrated as such, in some grand cathedral service, if it were *perfect* in its representations of the divine passion. But in this, as in all other of Elliott's performances, we miss the highest voices, the choral symphonies of the spiritual spheres. He sings of human love in its relation to the sexes, and to social life, with the lyre and emphasis of a master; but of the divinest love, to which all other love is but the prelude and the initiation, he knows nothing. He sticks to flesh and blood, and dare not trust the heavenly inspirations, lest they should lead him into mysticism. Still, this poem is worthy to have been pronounced at the banquet of Plato; and old Plutarch would have

worshipped the author of it. Let the following passages speak for themselves :—

“ Love ! eldest Muse, Time heard thine earliest lay
 When light through heaven led forth the new-born day.
The stars that give no accent to the wind,
Are golden odes, and music to the mind;
 So, Passion’s thrill is Nature’s minstrelsy ;
 So, to the young heart love is poetry.
 God of the soul ! illumination caught
 From thy bright glance, is energy to thought ;
 And song bereft of thee is cold and tame.

* * * * *

But when the heart looks through the eyes of love
 On Nature’s form, things lifeless breathe and move.
 The dewy forest smiles ; dim Morning shakes
 The rainbow from his plumage ; music wakes
 The dimpled ripple of the azure wave ;
 In fiery floods green hills their tresses lave,
 And myriad flowers, all brightening from the dews,
 Day’s earth-born stars, their golden beams effuse ;
 Transported passion bids rocks, floods, and skies,
 Burst into song, while her delighted eyes
 To all they see their own rich hues impart ;
 And the heart’s language speaks to every heart.”

A little further on I find the following lines, which, as they have a personal bearing upon the poet and his home, will be read with interest :—

“Love, ’twas my heart that named thee—sweetest word,
Here, or in highest heaven, pronounced or heard.
Whether by seraph near the throne above,
Or soul-sick maiden, in the vernal grove,
Or matron, with her first-born on her knee,
Or sweeter, lisped by rose-lipped infancy!
Yes, love! my heart did name thee; not because
Thy mandate gave the bright-haired comet laws;
Not that thy hand, in good Almightyest showers
The ever-blooming, fiery petalled flowers,
Wide o’er the fields of hyacinthine heaven;
But that to me thy richest smile hath given
Bliss, tried in pain. So ’mid my rosy boys,
In joy and grief, I sing thy griefs and joys.”

He then bursts out in these beautiful strains, picturing his own family group, and domestic happiness:—

“Blessed is the hearth when daughters gird the fire,
And sons that shall be happier than their sire,
Who sees them crowd around his evening chair,
While love and hope inspire his wordless prayer.
O from their home paternal may they go,
With little to unlearn, though much to know!
Them, may no poisoned tongue, no evil eye,
Curse for the virtues that refuse to die;
The generous heart, the independent mind,
Till truth, like falsehood, leaves a sting behind!
May Temperance crown their feast, and Friendship share!
May Pity come, Love’s sister spirit, there!
May they shun baseness, as they shun the grave!
May they be frugal, pious, humble, brave!

Sweet peace be theirs—the moonlight of the breast—
And occupation, and alternate rest ;
And dear to care and thought the rural walk ;
Theirs' be no flower that withers on the stalk,
But roses cropped, that shall not bloom in vain ;
And Hope's blessed sun, that sets to rise again.
Be chaste their nuptial bed, their home be sweet,
Their floor resound the tread of little feet ;
Blessed beyond fear and fate, if blessed by thee,
And heirs, O Love ! of thine Eternity."

Elliott's longest, and best work upon the whole, is "The Village Patriarch." It is professedly a political poem; and in the dedication—which is addressed to Henry Brougham—he calls it the incarnation of a century. Enoch Wray, the blind old Patriarch of the Village, is finely drawn, and his early recollection of better days is made to tell, with painful effect, upon the miseries which surround him in the desolation of his age. It is, in fact, an Epic of misery; and Elliott, like Dante, had been in hell. It is a book without hope, and his prophecies of England's future are as terrible as anything in Isaiah. It is embued, too, with the Hamlet spirit; or, perhaps I should say, with that of Manfred. But it is set in such a frame-work of poetic jewels, that it would be difficult to find its

compeer; and for pathos there is certainly no poem in our language to match it. It reads as if it were written in tears. The pictures of rustic scenery, however, which it contains, are sunny, genial, and glowing with life. Elliott knows most of the wild flowers by name, and the colour and fashion of their leaves and petals. Enoch appears at his cottage door, attracted by the brief sunshine of the winter's day, and the poet makes the red-breast trill his lay in the old man's ears, perched on a blossoming hazel. Rivers flow and murmur through his verses, and flash in the sunshine, through valley and meadow, or fall with trumpet voices over rocks in the dark and lonesome glen. The hum of the bee, and the twitter of the wren, are familiar and musical sounds to him; and he knows the song of all the forest birds. There is nothing too humble for his notice and love. The weed on the wall, the snake in the grass, the poor harmless fly—as gentle Shakspeare calls it—are all God's creatures, and dear to his heart. He says in his Autobiography, that he became acquainted in his walks with a beautiful green snake, about a yard long, which, on the fine Sabbath mornings, about

ten o'clock, seemed to expect him at the top of Primrose Lane. It became so familiar that it ceased to uncurl at his approach. And he has sat on the stile beside it, until it seemed unconscious of his presence. "When I arose to go," he says, "it would only lift the scales behind its head or the skin beneath them, and they shone in the sun like fire. I know not how often this beautiful and harmless child of God may have sat for his picture in my writings; a dozen at the least." And it was by this close observance of Nature, and through this deep love for her manifold creatures, that he came to represent them so truthfully in his poems. I know of nothing finer than this apostrophe to the Moors, which occurs in the fifth book of the *Village Patriarch* :—

"The moors ! all hail ! ye changeless, ye sublime !
That seldom hear a voice save that of Heaven.
Scorners of chance, and fate, and death, and time,
But not of him whose viewless hand hath riven
The chasm, through which the mountain stream is driven.
How like a prostrate giant—not in sleep—
But listening to his beating heart, ye lie.
With winds and clouds dread harmony ye keep ;
Ye seem alone beneath the boundless sky ;
Ye speak, are mute, and there is no reply."

In the centre, however, of all this outward array of beauty, which clothes the poem, the worm of decay and death is gnawing; and the poet leads us from the banqueting halls of Nature to a horrid feast of skulls. Misery and famine are everywhere; and when the curtain falls over the poem, it is as if a dark blanket were dropped down from heaven by sorrowing angels, over some region of beauty abandoned to despair.

The concluding lines of this fine poem are amongst his happiest and most successful efforts:—

“And when the woodbine’s clustered trumpet blows;
And when the pink’s melodious hues shall speak,
In unison of sweetness with the rose,
Joining the song of every bird that knows
How sweet it is of wedded love to sing;
And when the fells, fresh bathed in azure air,
Wide as the summer day’s all golden wing,
Shall blush to Heaven, that nature is so fair,
And man condemned to labour in despair;
Then the gay gnat, that sports its little hour;
The falcon, wheeling from the ancient wood;
The redbreast, fluttering o’er its fragrant bower;
The yellow-bellied lizard of the flood;
And dewy morn, and evening—in her hood
Of crimson, fringed with lucid shadows grand—
Shall miss the Patriarch; at his cottage door

The bee shall seek to settle on his hand,
But from the vacant bench haste to the moor,
Mourning the last of England's high-souled poor,
And bid the mountains weep for Enoch Wray!
And for themselves!—albeit of things that last
Unaltered most; for they shall pass away
Like Enoch, though their iron roots seem fast
Bound to the eternal future, as the past;
The Patriarch died! and they shall be no more.
Yes, and the sailless worlds, which navigate
The unutterable deep, that hath no shore,
Will lose their starry splendour soon or late!
Like tapers, quenched by him whose will is fate!
Yes, and the Angel of Eternity,
Who numbers worlds, and writes their names in light,
Ere long, Oh Earth, will look in vain for thee!
And start, and stop, in his unerring flight,
And, with his wings of sorrow and affright,
Veil his impassioned brow and heavenly tears!"

"The Splendid Village" is a poem of the same cast as "The Village Patriarch," and is another chapter of the prophecies of Jeremiah, although written as a satire. He laments the decay of old virtues and customs, and mourns once more over the bloated prosperity of the bad, and the wretchedness and poverty of the people. It contains, like all his poems, passages of great tenderness and beauty.

"Bothwell" and "Kerhonah" are attempts at dramatic poetry, and failures. For Elliott

is no Proteus, and can assume no other form than his own. His individuality is too strong in him to be put off, and he makes all men in his own likeness.

“The Ranter” and “The Corn Law Rhymes,” which first attracted the general notice of the public to the Poet, are amongst his happiest effusions. “The Gospel Tree” sermon is a historic record, and reflects all that the eloquent preacher Stephens, or the Chartist orator Vincent, has thought, felt, and spoken in the late disastrous times.—Whilst, however, I can understand the intense earnestness which breathes throughout this poem, I find fault with the poem itself, as I do with most of Elliott’s longer works, because it is too literary. He is always at the height of his strength, and one can feel the strong writer in his sentences, and detect his art. In other words, he aims at powerful writing, and his real strength often passes away in thunder-clouds. It was the fault of his nature, which on one side was all antagonism, and on the other all love. There is a strange fascination, however, about this short poem, which nothing but genius could produce. The materials are bare and scanty, and there is neither plot nor plan in it;

yet it is wonderfully effective. We have first of all a picture of the cottage where the Ranter lodges—then we see the poor widow rise at daybreak, to prepare breakfast for her little household, for it is the Sabbath morning, and the Ranter's congregation of mechanics will soon await him at the Gospel Tree. Presently she goes to awake her son, and we see her trembling with indecision as she gazes upon the face of her "o'er laboured boy"—half inclined to let him sleep on. But she knows it would pain him to miss the morning's discourse, for it may be the last he will ever hear from the poor preacher, whose pale and wasted form is already smitten with the blight and mildew of death. So she rouses him; and he accompanies the Ranter to the place of meeting, whilst,

——— " the mountains one by one
Ascend in light ; and slow the mists retire
From vale and plain. The clouds on Stannington
Behold a rocket—No, 'tis Morthen spire!
The sun is risen ! cries Stanedge, tipped with fire ;
On Norwood's flowers the dew-drops shine and shake ;
Up, sluggards, up ! and drink the morning breeze.
The birds on cloud-left Osgathorpe awake ;
And Wincobank is waving all his trees
O'er subject towns, and farms, and villages,
And gleaming streams, and woods, and waterfalls.

Up climb the oak crown'd summit ! Hooper Stand,
And Keppel's Pillar gaze on Wentworth's halls,
And misty lakes, that brighten and expand,
And distant hills, that watch the western strand.
Up ! trace God's foot-prints where they paint the mould
With heavenly green, and hues that blush and glow
Like angels' wings ; while skies of blue and gold
Stoop for Miles Gordon on the mountain's brow."

And in the midst of this magnificent scenery, under the old oak of Shirecliffe, the Ranter delivers his sermon. After which the congregation disperses, and the poor brave Preacher disappears to die. But the image of the man never leaves you after reading the poem, although Elliott gives no portrait of him. It is the words he speaks which fashion him to our minds, and give him such a distinct individuality. I may add also, that the conclusion of the sermon is the most hopeful prophecy to be found in Elliott's writings, and I will quote it here as a specimen of the sunny side of his mind :—

"Poor Bread-taxed Slaves ! have ye no hope on earth ?
Yes ! God from evil still educes good ;
Sublime events are rushing to their birth ;
Lo, tyrants by their victims are withstood !
And Freedom's seed still grows, though steeped in blood.

When by our Father's voice the skies are riven,
That, like the winnowed chaff, disease may fly ;
And seas are shaken by the breath of Heaven,
Lest in their depths the living Spirit die ;
Man views the scene with awed, but grateful eye,
And trembling feels, could God abuse his power
Nor man, nor Nature, would endure an hour.
But there is mercy in his seeming wrath ;
It smites to save—not tyrant-like to slay :
And storms have beauty as the lily hath :
Grand are the clouds, that mirrored on the bay,
Roll, like the shadows of lost worlds, away,
When bursts through broken gloom, the startled light ;
Grand are the waves that, like that broken gloom,
Are smitten into splendour by his might ;
And glorious is the storm's tremendous boom,
Although it waileth o'er a watery tomb,
And is a dreadful Ode on Oceans drowned.
Despond not, then, ye plundered sons of trade !
Hope's wounded wing shall yet disdain the ground,
And Commerce, while the powers of evil fade,
Shout o'er all seas,—' All Lands for me were made.'
Her's are the apostles destined to go forth
Upon the wings of mighty winds, and preach
Christ crucified ! To her the south and north
Look through their tempests ; and her love shall reach
Their farthest ice, if life there be to teach.
Yes, world-reforming Commerce, one by one,
Thou vanquishest earth's tyrants ! and the hour
Cometh, when all shall fall before thee—gone
Their splendour, fallen their trophies, lost their power.
Then o'er the enfranchised nations wilt thou shower,
Like dew-drops from the pinions of the dove,

Plenty and peace ; and never more on thee
Shall bondage wait ; but as the thoughts of love,
Free shalt thou fly, unchainable and free ;
And men, thenceforth, shall call thee ‘liberty!’”

The Corn Law Rhymes, notwithstanding their occasional coarseness, are real poetry—effusions from the heart. They are dedicated “to all who revere the memory of Jeremy Bentham, our second Locke, and wish to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, for the greatest length of time.” Poor Elliott ! How fast a hold the spirit of Political Economy has upon his mind ! and how strangely it distorts and darkens his vision. One could have wished that he had seen a little deeper than good Jeremy Bentham’s philosophy ; or at least, that he might have outlived it ; flinging it from him as the lumber of a dead world, through which he had victoriously fought his way. But neither in these Rhymes, nor in his latest writings, is there any evidence of his Spiritual progression. He is painfully bound in chains, like Prometheus to his rock, and in the highest sense, can neither sink nor soar. He always harps on the same string—with a Paganini’s hand, it is true—but one wearies even of the most

beautiful variations, when the melody is always the same.

His writings divide themselves naturally into three distinct parts; each of which represents a phase of the mind and genius of the Poet. They consist, firstly, of the Political Poems; secondly, of the *Æsthetic*, or those which relate to the affections, and the cultivation of the Taste; and, thirdly, those of a Moral and Descriptive nature, wherein the poet, by a direct teaching and exhortation, seeks to raise the minds of the people into the regions of truth and duty. It must not be supposed, however, that these divisions follow in consecutive order, or that the Poet designed his writings to fall into this classification. He simply obeyed his genius, and wrote as he was inspired, without reference to psychological manifestation. Whoso, however, will take the trouble to examine his works, will find that they resolve themselves into the divisions above alluded to. In some of his greater poems there will of course be found a fusion of the faculties, which are singly predominant in others; for in all serious undertakings of this nature, whatever is in a poet will come out of him;

and he is sure to develop the entire wealth and capabilities of his genius. But in his lyrical moments he will obey the mood which possesses him, whether it be Political, Æsthetic, or Moral.

I will now quote examples of his art under the three divisions I have named, commencing with the Political ones.

BATTLE SONG.

“DAY, like our souls, is fiercely dark—

What then? 'Tis day!

We sleep no more: the crows—hark!

To arms! away!

They come! they come! the knell is rung

Of us, or them;

Wide o'er their march the pomp is flung

Of gold, and gem.

What collared hound of lawless sway,

To famine dear—

What pensioned slave of Attila,

Leads in the rear?

Come they from Seythian wilds afar,

Our blood to spill?

Wear they the livery of the Czar?

They do his will.

Nor tassel'd silk, nor epaulette,

Nor plume, nor corse;

No splendour gilds, all sternly met,
Our foot and horse.

But dark and still, we inly glow,
Condensed in ire!
Strike, tawdry slaves! and ye shall know,
Our gloom is fire.

In vain your pomp, ye evil powers,
Insults the land;
Wrongs, vengeance, and *the cause* are ours!
And God's right hand!

Madmen! they trample into snakes
The wormy clod!
Like fire beneath their feet awakes
The sword of God.

Behind, before, above, below,
They rouse the brave;
Where'er they go, they make a foe,
Or find a grave."

This is perhaps the finest of his Political Poems, and reminds one, in its spirit, of the wonderful "*Sword Song*," by Körner. The opening verse is full of martial music; and we can hear the gathering of mighty hosts, and the trampling of armed feet, throughout the poem. Terrible and defiant stand the two hostile armies; and the pageantry of the "tawdry slaves" of

power, is finely contrasted with the dark unbannered "foot and horse" of the oppressed, all sternly met for battle. It is an ideal celebration of the fight between Right and Wrong, which Elliott, in all probability, imagined would one day be realized in the terrible manner he has described. But this song will give no idea of the Poet, in his coarse and eccentric moods; and as I design to exhibit every phase of his character, it will be necessary to quote the following:—

SQUIRE LEECH.

" COME, Lord Pauper! pay my bill
For radish tops and fire;
Ploughman Joe, and Weaver Will,
Keep Robert Leech, Esquire.
You say, shares are fairly shared
Between the high and low;
While we starve, this joke runs hard
On bread-taxed Will and Joe.

Leech drinks wine; sometimes enough;
But then he drinks in style:
Club-feast ale is sinful stuff;
And pewter plate is vile.
Robert rides, and Robert drives,—
His feeders bare-foot go;
Will is clamming; bread-tax thrives;
And tread-mill's clamming Joe.

‘ Give,’ of old, the Horse Leech cried :

Squire Robert cries, ‘ Give ! Give ! ’

How the leeches are belied !

They suck, yet *cannot live*.

Little souls grow less and less,

And ever downward grow :

‘ Live and let live,’ they profess,

And feed on Will and Joe !

Bread tax murders trade and hope :

Lord Pauper cries ‘ Well done ! ’

Bread tax is not yet a rope

To every rascal’s son.

Justice is not done, ’tis said,

To Robert Leech & Co. ;

Gibbet is not tax on bread,—

But Bread tax gibbets Joe.’

Here is another poem belonging to the same class as the last, although it is more serious, and indeed fearfully earnest:—

CAGED RATS.

“ YE coop us up, and tax our bread,

And wonder why we pine ;

But ye are fat, and round, and red,

And filled with tax-bought wine :

Thus twelve rats starve while three rats thrive,

(Like you on mine and me,)

When fifteen rats are caged alive,

With food for nine and three.

Haste! Havoc's torch begins to glow—
The ending is begun;
Make haste! Destruction thinks ye slow;
Make haste to be undone!
Why are ye called 'my Lord,' and 'Squire,'
While fed by mine and me,
And wringing food, and clothes, and fire,
From bread taxed misery?

Make haste, slow rogues! prohibit trade,
Prohibit honest gain;
Turn all the good that God hath made
To fear, and hate, and pain;
Till beggars all, assassins all,
All cannibals we be,
And death shall have no funeral
From shipless sea to sea."

I will not dwell longer, however, upon these political effusions, but proceed to give specimens of his æsthetic poems. These cannot be introduced more appropriately than by the following picture of—

THE HOME OF TASTE.

"You seek a home of taste, and find
The proud mechanic there,
Rich as a king, and less a slave,
'Throned in his elbow-chair!
Or on his sofa reading Locke,
Beside his open door!

Why start?—Why envy worth like his
The carpet on his floor?

You seek the home of sluttish—
‘Is John at home?’ you say,
‘No, sir; he’s at the “Sportman’s Arms;”
The dog fight’s o’er the way.’
Oh, lift the workman’s heart and mind
Above low sensual sin!
Give him a home! the home of taste!
Outbid the house of gin!

Oh, give him taste! it is the link
Which binds us to the skies—
A bridge of rainbows thrown across
The gulph of tears and sighs;
Or like a widower’s little one—
An angel in a child—
That leads him to her mother’s chair,
And shows him how she smiled.”

It was one of Elliott’s darling schemes, to raise the homes of the working classes; and he knew that this could only be done by cultivating their taste, feelings, and intellectual faculties. Hence, he exhorted them to ceaseless thrift and industry, and to the study of good and ennobling books in their leisure hours. To stimulate them to this course, he described in many of his poems the beauty and dignity of home,

when presided over by wise and virtuous people. He showed, likewise, that the limited means of the industrious classes were no bar to elegance and happiness; and there is a direct teaching of this sort in the following household pictures :—

SATURDAY.

“ TO-MORROW will be Sunday, Ann,—
Get up my child with me ;
Thy father rose at four o’clock
To toil for me and thee.

The fine folks use the plate he makes,
And praise it when they dine ;
For John has taste—so we’ll be neat,
Although we can’t be fine.

Then let us shake the carpet well,
And wash and scour the floor,
And hang the weather-glass he made
Beside the cupboard-door

And polish thou the grate, my love ;
I’ll mend the sofa arm ;
The autumn winds blow damp and chill ;
And John loves to be warm.

And bring the new white curtain out,
And string the pink tape on—
Mechanics should be neat and clean :
And I’ll take heed for John.

And brush the little table, child,
And fetch the ancient books—
John loves to read ; and when he reads,
How like a king he looks !

And fill the music-glasses up
With water fresh and clear ;
To-morrow, when he sings and plays,
The *street* will stop to hear.

And throw the dead flowers from the vase,
And rub it till it glows ;
For in the leafless garden yet
He'll find a winter rose.

And lichen from the wood he'll bring,
And mosses from the dell :
And from the sheltered stubble-field
The scarlet pimpernel."

Here is a holiday for the working man
most beautifully described :—

HOLIDAY.

"OH blessed ! when some holiday
Brings townsmen to the moor,
And in the sunbeams brighten up
The sad looks of the poor.

The bee puts on her richest gold,
As if that worker knew—
How hardly (and for little) they
Their sunless task pursue.

But from their souls the sense of wrong
On dove-like pinion flies ;
And, throned o'er all, forgiveness sees
His image in their eyes.

Soon tired, the street-born lad lies down
On marjoram and thyme,
And through his grated fingers sees
The falcon's flight sublime ;

Then his pale eyes, so bluely dull
Grow darkly blue with light,
And his lips redden like the bloom
O'er miles of mountain bright.

The little lovely maiden-hair
Turns up its happy face,
And saith unto the poor man's heart,
'Thou'rt welcome to this place.'

The infant river leapeth free
Amid the bracken tall,
And cries, 'FOR EVER there is ONE
Who reigneth over all ;

'And unto him, as unto me,
Thou'rt welcome to partake
His gift of light, His gift of air,
O'er mountain, glen, and lake.

'Our father loves us, want-worn man !
And know thou this from me,
The pride that makes thy pain his couch,
May wake to envy thee.

‘ Hard, hard to bear are want and toil,
As thy worn features tell ;
But Wealth is armed with fortitude,
And bears thy sufferings well.’ ”

The following is an example of the poet’s moral teaching ; and perhaps nothing can better express his constant delight in contemplating the works of Nature, and his deep reverence for Nature’s God, than the quotation of this solemn and hopeful

FUNERAL HYMN.

“ FATHER ! our brother’s course is run,
And we bring home Thy weary son ;
No more he toils, no more he weeps ;
And shall we mourn because he sleeps ?

He thank’d Thee, God of earth and sky,
For all that creep, and all that fly ;
For weeds, that silent anthems raise,
And thoughts, that make their silence praise.

For every thorn and every flower !
For conquering Right and baffled Power ;
For all the meek and all the proud,
He thank’d the Lord of sun and cloud.

For soul to feel and sight to see,
In all Thy works, but types of Thee ;
For all Thy works, and for Thy Word,
In life and death, he thank’d Thee, Lord.

He thank'd Thee, too, for struggles long,
For storms that make the feeble strong ;
For every pang Thy goodness gave ;
For hope deferr'd—and for the grave.

Oh, welcome in the morn, the road
That climbs to Virtue's high abode !
But when descends the evening dew,
The inn of rest is welcome, too.

Thou say'st to man, ' Arise, and run
Thy glorious course, like yonder sun !'
But when Thy children need repose,
Their Father's hand the curtain draws.

What though with eyes that yet can weep,
The sinner trembles into sleep ?
Thou know'st he yet shall wake and rise
To gaze on Mercy's brightest skies.

The fearful child, though still caress'd,
Will tremble on his mother's breast ;
But he, she knows, is safe from ill,
Though, watched by love, he trembles still.

Lord ! when our brother wakes, may they
Who watch beneath thy footstool, say,
' Another wanderer is forgiven !
Another child is born in Heaven !' ”

“ Forest Worship ” is likewise a beautiful poem, notwithstanding the mixture of politics and religion which it contains :—

FOREST WORSHIP.

“ WITHIN the sunlit forest,
Our roof the bright blue sky,
Where fountains flow, and wild flowers blow,
We lift our hearts on high.
Beneath the frown of wicked men
Our country’s strength is bowing ;
But, thanks to God ! they can’t prevent
The lone wild flowers from blowing.

High, high, above the tree-tops,
The lark is soaring free,
Where streams the light through broken clouds
His speckled breast I see :
Beneath the might of wicked men
The poor man’s worth is dying ;
But, thanked be God ! in spite of them,
The lark still warbles flying !

The preacher prays, ‘ Lord bless us ! ’
‘ Lord bless us ! ’ Echo cries ;
‘ Amen ! ’ the breezes murmur low,
‘ Amen ! ’ the rill replies ;
The ceaseless toil of wo-worn hearts,
The proud with pangs are paying ;
But here, O God of earth and heaven !
The humble heart is praying !

How softly in the pauses
Of song, re-echoed wide,
The cushet’s coo, the linnet’s lay,
O’er rill and river glide !

With evil deeds of evil men
The affrighted land is ringing,
But still, O Lord ! the pious heart
And soul-toned voice are singing !

Hush ! hush ! the Preacher preacheth !
‘ Wo ! to the oppressor, wo !
But sudden gloom o’ercasts the sun
And saddened flowers below :
So frowns the Lord !—but tyrants, ye
Deride his indignation,
And see not in his gathered brow
Your days of tribulation ! ’

Speak low, thou heaven-paid teacher !
The tempest bursts above :
God whispers in the thunder ; hear
The terrors of his love !
On useful hands, and honest hearts,
The base their wrath are wreaking ;
But, thank’d be God ! they can’t prevent
The storm of heaven from speaking.”

I will close these extracts with a few more specimens from his miscellaneous poems ; and the reader will then have a fair conception of the range of Elliott’s mind. The two which follow are very striking and beautiful, and are in his highest manner :—

LEAVES AND MEN.

“ DROP, drop into the grave, Old Leaf,
Drop, drop into the grave ;
Thy acorns grown, thy acorns sown,—
Drop, drop into the grave.
December's tempests rave, Old Leaf,
Above thy forest-grave, Old Leaf ;
Drop, drop into the grave.

The birds in Spring, will, sweetly sing,
That death alone is sad ;
The grass will grow, the primrose show,
That death alone is sad ;
Lament above thy grave, Old Leaf ;
For what has life to do with grief ?
'Tis death alone that's sad.

What then ? We two have both lived through
The sunshine and the rain ;
And blessed be He, to me and thee,
Who sent His sun and rain.
We've had our sun and rain, Old Leaf,
And God will send again, Old Leaf,
The sunshine and the rain.

Race after race of leaves and men,
Bloom, wither, and are gone :
As winds and waters rise and fall,
So life and death roll on ;
And long as ocean heaves, Old Leaf,
And bud and fade the leaves, Old Leaf,
Will life and death roll on.

How like am I to thee, Old Leaf!
We'll drop together down ;
How like art thou to me, Old Leaf!
We'll drop together down.
I'm grey, and thou art brown, Old Leaf!
We'll drop together down, Old Leaf,
We'll drop together down.

Drop, drop into the grave, Old Leaf,
Drop, drop into the grave ;
Thy acorns grown, thy acorns sown,—
Drop, drop into the grave.
December's tempests rave, Old Leaf,
Above thy forest-grave, Old Leaf ;
Drop, drop into the grave ! ”

OH, TELL US.

I.

“ COMPANIONED each, by all and none,
A mob of souls, yet each alone,
We journey to the dread Unknown.

II.

In nothing found, in all things shown,
In all life living, yet alone,
Where may it be, that dread Unknown ?

III.

Oh, who, or what, so dreadfully shown,
And world-attended, yet alone,
Is that all-sought, all-known Unknown ? ”

The following lines remind us of Goëthe :—

TO FANNY ANN.

“ As the flower bloweth,
As the stream floweth,
Daughter of beauty,
Do thou thy duty.
What, though the morrow
May dawn in sorrow ?
E'en as light hasteth,
Darkness, too, wasteth ;
Morn then discloses,
Rain-drops on roses !
Daughter of beauty,
What then is duty ?
Time says, ‘ Death knoweth !’
Death says, ‘ Time showeth !’ ”

The poem which I shall now quote was sent me in MS., and appeared originally in “ The Truth Seeker ” Magazine, edited by my friend, Dr. Lees, of Leeds. It is entitled

LET ME REST.

“ HE does well who does his best ;
Is he weary ? Let him rest :
Brothers ! I have done my best ;
I am weary—let me rest.
After toiling oft in vain,
Baffled, yet to struggle fain ;

After toiling long to gain
 Little good, and mickle pain ;
 Let me rest—but lay me low,
 Where the hedge-side roses blow ;
 Where the little daisies grow ;
 Where the winds a-Maying go ;
 Where the foot-path rustics plod ;
 Where the breeze-bowed poplars nod ;
 Where the old woods worship God ;
 Where His pencil paints the sod ;
 Where the wedded throstle sings ;
 Where the young bird tries his wings,
 Where the wailing plover swings
 Near the runlet's rushy springs !
 Where at times the tempest's roar,
 Shaking distant sea and shore,
 Still will rave old Barnsdale o'er,
 To be heard by me no more ;
 There, beneath the breezy west,
 Tired and thankful, let me rest,
 Like a child, that sleepeth best
 On its gentle mother's breast."

The following poems may be cited, as specimens of the pathetic power developed in the Corn Law Rhymes :—

1.

" WHERE the poor cease to pay,
 Go loved one, and rest,
 Thou art wearing away
 To the land of the blest.

Our father is gone
Where the wronged are forgiven,
And that dearest one,
Thy husband, in heaven.

II.

No toil in despair ;
No tyrant, no slave ;
No Bread-tax is there,
With a maw like the grave ;
But the Poacher, thy pride,
Whelmed in ocean afar :
And his brother who died
Land-butchered in war ;

III.

And their mother who sank
Broken-hearted, to rest ;
And the baby that drank
Till it froze on her breast ;
With tears and with smiles,
Are waiting for thee
In the beautiful isles,
Where the wronged are the free.

IV.

Go loved one, and rest ;
Where the poor cease to pay !
To the land of the blest
Thou art wearing away ;
But the son of thy pride
Shall yet stay with thee,
And poor little Jane,
Look sadly like thee."

SONG.

“CHILD, is thy father dead ?

Father is gone !

Why did they tax his bread ?

God's will be done !

Mother has sold her bed ;

Better to die than wed !

Where shall she lay her head ?

Home we have none !

Father clamm'd thrice a week—

God's will be done !

Long for work did he seek,

Work he found none.

Tears on his hollow cheek

Told what no tongue could speak :

Why did his master break ?

God's will be done !

Doctor said air was best—

Food we had none ;

Father, with panting breast,

Groaned to be gone :

Now he is with the blest—

Mother says death is best !

We have no place of rest—

Yes, ye have one !”



Biography of the Poet.

PART II.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE POET.

AND now, having given a general characterization of the mind and writings of our Poet, let us take a glimpse at his early history, and try if we can discover the process by which his mind and character were developed. His Autobiography, which appeared in No. 1159 of the *Athenæum*, and extends to his twenty-third year, will enable us to accomplish this; and it is one of the most interesting pieces of personal history upon record. It is written in a style as unvarnished as that of Gibbon, and contains all the prominent features in his early career, both of mind and fortune. It is too long to extract in these pages, but it will well repay the student for a private and careful reading. We will first relate the particulars of his birth and parentage, and then run rapidly over such parts of

his subsequent history, as may throw light upon our investigation.

Elliott was born at the New Foundry, Masbrough, in the parish of Rotherham, March 17th, 1781; and was well nigh smothered before he had been in the world a quarter of an hour. His son Francis, who relates the story to me in a private letter, says: "In the hurry and confusion attendant upon his birth, he was laid in an open drawer, which was presently shut by another person, who did not notice its contents, and the child was missing for some minutes, and could not be found. Fortunately, however, he was rescued from his perilous situation by the same hands that placed him in it, and restored to his mother. Three quarters of a century later, this child repealed the Corn Laws; and it would be interesting to know how many hungry deaths, how many broken fortunes, how many broken hearts, the timely opening of that drawer has saved." His father, who, for his eccentricities, and ultra-calvinistic notions, was called "Devil Elliott," was a dissenter; and our Poet was baptized by one Tommy Wright, a Barnsley tinker, who belonged to the same school of theology as Elliott's father, and

believed that "hell was hung round with little children, a span long;" a belief by no means uncommon in those days, nor even in later times, as I have good reason to remember. He describes the ancestors of his grandfather Elliott, as border thieves, who lived on the cattle they stole, both from English and Scotch, and thinks he has made out a good pedigree so far. Of his own father he speaks in high terms. He was married to an opulent yeoman's daughter near Huddersfield, and settled in business at Masbrough, as an iron-founder, where Ebenezer, and all his other children were born and bred. "I can remember seeing," says the poet's son Francis, "when very young, the name Elliott in twisted iron, over the door of a little, low, time-dark building, at the top of the High Street, in the town above-named, where my father and his brother Giles, if I mistake not, spent many years of their youth and early manhood in serving customers with iron-mongery. My grandfather was a man of great natural shrewdness and penetration, with a talent for humour and satire, fond of controversy, especially on theology, and possessed of respectable literary powers.

"I have seen a 'rhymed Paraphrase of

Job,' written by him; and I must do my buried ancestor the justice to say that it did not require a Job's patience to read it. If not very poetical in its structure, it is at least as good as many noted pieces in Pope and Dryden. It is sententious, concise, and logical. My grandmother was a very different person; all heart, sensitiveness, and meekness. The slightest look, word, or tone of unkindness, cut her to the quick; whilst a whole world of injuries could not arouse within her the shadow of a desire for revenge. She had great personal attractions, a soft and gentle style of beauty, which was sister to her heart. She was a very violet in sweetness and unobtrusiveness, and she had a violet's fate, too. She lived unnoticed, and misfortune trod her out of life. My grandfather's bankruptcy broke her heart."

Mr. P. Rodgers, of Sheffield, has furnished me with the following anecdote of the poet's father. "In those days, when the French were generally considered Atheists, and the divine right of kings was an article of almost universal belief—it is no wonder that the poet's father, who was a Jacobin and ultracalvinist, should be regarded with dread by some, and suspicion by others. He was not

a man, however, to be trodden upon with impunity. His son alludes, in the poem called 'The Jacobin's Prayer,' to an incident in his father's life which I well remember, and which furnishes a good illustration of his character. The Rotherham troop of Yeomanry had had a field-day. It was getting towards evening; and previous to the dismissal of the men, they were drawn up in a line, in High Street, with their faces to the Crown Inn, while some one was addressing a loyal speech to them from one of the windows. Mr. Elliott's shop being in the narrowest part of the street, and, from some cause or other, one or more of the military steeds, which stood with their hinder parts towards his door and windows, beginning to prance, they were not long before their tails and haunches came through the glass. The old man immediately conceived the idea, that the seeming accident was done on purpose, and because he was a Jacobin. Under this impression he flew into a terrible rage, seized, I believe, upon some offensive weapon, which the stock in his own shop supplied, and rushed to the assault. A disturbance ensued, but no blood was shed; and thus the affair did not end so seriously as it might

have done, considering what it was to quarrel with the authorities in those days. Probably, Mr. Elliott's real respectability in the eyes of his neighbours, together with his commercial influence in the town, protected him from similar consequences to those which befel the more unfortunate James Montgomery, at a little earlier date, in Sheffield."

Such, then, was the parentage of the poet—and his physical and mental characteristics may be traced, in a great measure, to this source. He had his father's strength of mind and character, and his mother's sensitiveness and nervous weakness. He gives us a picture of his father's home, whilst he was a clerk at the foundry, and before he became the proprietor of it, which is interesting in many important respects. "Under the room where I was born," he says, "in a little parlour like the cabin of a ship, which was yearly painted green, and blessed with a beautiful thoroughfare of light—for there was no window-tax in those days—my father used to preach every fourth Sunday, to persons who came from distances of twelve to fourteen miles, to hear his tremendous doctrines of ultra-calvinism. On other days, pointing to the aqua-tint pictures on the walls, he de-

lighted to declaim on the virtues of slandered Cromwell, and of Washington the rebel ; or, shaking his sides with laughter, explain the glories of the ‘glorious victory of his Majesty’s forces over the rebels at Bunker’s Hill.’ ” “Here,” he adds, “the reader has a key which will unlock all my future politics.” And the fact is worth remembering. He relates, as proof of his nervous sensibility, that at twelve years of age he fell in love with a young woman, to whom he never spoke a word in his life, and whose voice he never heard. “Yet if I thought she saw me,” he adds, “as I passed her father’s house, I felt as if weights were tied to my feet.” This is the old story, in a new form, illustrative of the power of love over the youthful heart ; and Elliott is not the last person who will feel these weights to his feet, in the presence of the beloved object. The fact, however, made a deep impression upon him throughout life ; for it was the first sunbeam that fell upon the dark fallows of his nature, and quickened them into flowers and verdure. From this moment he was a new being, and his poetical tendencies began to develop themselves. In the yard of the foundry, surrounded by blast furnaces, and half-naked

smiths, hammering at innumerable anvils, he contrived a little garden of mugwort and wormwood, and placed a pan of water in the midst of it, where he could see the reflection of the sun and clouds, and of the plants themselves, as from the surface of a natural fountain. And this anecdote, trifling as it may seem, contains the microcosm of the poet's genius; for Nature has no new methods, but repeats, and re-repeats herself in every one of her processes; and the macrocosm is but the microcosm, on a large and complete scale. Combined, however, with this love for the beautiful, Elliott had also a strange taste for the horrible—a passion—a rage, for seeing the faces of the hanged or the drowned. These frightful visages made his life a burden, followed him wherever he went, and haunted him in his dreams. He cannot account for this morbid love of the dark and obscene imagery of death; and asks whether it was a result of constitutional infirmity? and whether it had any connexion with his taste for writing of horrors and crimes? I think there can be no doubt of the answer to either of these questions, and I can trace the effects of this morbid taste in his poems. During childhood he had no

associates; and although the neighbourhood swarmed with children, he was alone. Hence his mind fell back upon itself, and by dwelling too much upon its own reflections, and constantly brooding over the mixed imagery of beauty and horror which possessed it, he grew unhealthy and diseased. Still his solitude was not painful; and he occasionally occupied himself in constructing boats and ships. He remarks, however, that his imitative talents secured him no respect; and he was altogether unaware that he possessed others of a higher and nobler order, which were one day to awake the admiration and secure the applause of the world. Nature, however, knew what she was about in impelling him to these ingenious devices of boats and ships; for now he must go down to the water's side and launch them; and there, in the midst of sunshine, flowers, and darnels, she taught him many preparatory poetic lessons.

He speaks with unconscious complaint of his "wondrous brother Giles,"—who was beautiful as an angel,—and compared with whom he (the poet) was ugliness itself. "In the presence of his splendid abilities," he says, "I might well look like a fool, and

believe myself one. As I grew up, my fondness for solitude increased; for I could not but observe the homage that was paid to him, and feel the contempt with which I was regarded; although I am not aware that I ever envied or at all disliked him."

His ninth year was an era in his life, he says, for his father having cast a great pan, weighing several tons, for an uncle who lived in Thurlstone, the young embryo poet resolved to travel thither with it; and accordingly, at sunset, he stole unperceived, and hid himself inside the pan amongst the hay. As the night advanced, he looked forth from his hiding-place, and gazed long with new, strange, and excited feelings, upon the great blue vault of heaven, with its solemn and lonely stars. "I have not forgotten," he writes, "how much I was excited by the solemnity of the night, and its shooting stars, until I arrived at Thurlstone, about four o'clock in the morning." His uncle, who was of course surprised to see him, made the best of his visit, and sent him to school at Penistone, where he learnt nothing. His heart, too, was with his mother; and he spent his evenings in looking from the back of his uncle's house to Hoyland Swaine; for he had

discovered that Masbrough lay beyond that village; "and ever when the sun went down, I felt," he says, "as if some great wrong had been done me."

When he returned from this "land of the great Pan," as he calls it, he was sent to Hollis's School, in Sheffield, but made no proficiency in his studies. All his sums were done for him by the other boys, and his father regarded him as a confirmed dunce. He confesses that he could never learn anything at school—that he got into the Rule of Three without having any knowledge of numeration, and stuck in Decimals, like Christian in his bog of Despond. Still he was looked up to, by the other boys at school, and his brother Giles, when in danger, always took Elliott out to defend him. His father, as a last resource, finding that he had made nothing out at Hollis's Hospital, sent him to Dalton School, two miles from Masbrough, where he hoped to have him more under his own eye. "I see," says Elliott, "at this moment, as vividly as if fifty years had not since passed over me, the kingfisher shooting along the Don, as I passed schoolward through the Aldwark Meadows, eating my dinner four hours before dinner-time." And so Nature

was revenged upon the schoolmaster ; for she taught the boy her great mystic alphabet and deep symbol writing, before he could either read a book, or write a line. She took her own way likewise in doing it, eschewing the methods of the pedant. Elliott made no proficiency at this new school—although his master was a kind and good man—“a sort of sad-looking, half-starved angel without wings,” he says, “and I have stood for hours beside his desk, with the tears running down my face, utterly unable to set down one correct figure.” His ignorance, and apparent want of common capacity, disgusted him with school duties, and during the summer months he was almost always absent—playing truant amongst the woods of Dalton, Deign, Silverwood, and Thryberg Park. On one of these occasions he stole duck eggs, mistaking them for the eggs of wild birds, and was brought before the Lady of the Manor for his delinquency, who dismissed him when she saw what a live goose he was.

These truantings were soon discovered by the poet's father, who resolved at last to make him work in the foundry. “The result of this experiment,” says Elliott, “vexed the experimenter ; for it was soon found that I

could play my part at the York Keelman, with the best of its customers." He was never fond of the alehouse, however, and his thoughts were always wandering to the canal banks, which were covered all over with the golden "*ladies'-bedstraw*," and to his little ships. In other respects the trial at the foundry proved successful, for Elliott found he was not less clever than other beginners, and the work he had to do, was done. He mentions that about this time, he had strong religious impressions, and attended the ministrations of an eccentric Domine Sampson, with regularity and profit. But Nature at this juncture played him another trick, and dissipated his religious moods with her fine nicknackery of flowers. Happening to call one Sunday at his Aunt Robinson's—a widow with three children and £30 a-year, out of which she gave her two sons an education, which made them both gentlemen—he became acquainted with "Sowerby's English Botany." "Never shall I forget," he says, "the impression made upon me by the beautiful plates. I actually touched the figure of the primrose, half convinced that the mealiness on the leaves was real." The good aunt seeing the delight he took in these pictures,

showed him how to draw the figures, by holding them to the light with a thin piece of paper before them. Finding he could draw them correctly, *he was lifted at once*, he says, *above the inmates of the alehouse, at least a foot in mental stature.* And here we may see the reason why, in his æsthetic poems, he exhorts the working classes to cultivate a "Home of Taste." His aunt then showed him a book of *Dry Plants*, which, with the Botanical work, belonged to her son Benjamin. And these cheap and simple exhibitions gave an impulse to Elliott's mind which never abandoned him, until it had completed its work, and conducted him to the Elysian fields of poetry. He soon after began to study Botany on his own account—not, however, in a consecutive and scientific manner—for to the day of his death he never relished Botany as a science; the classifications of which seemed to him to be like preparations for sending flowers to prison. The minister, who had begun to entertain hopes of Elliott's conversion, made frequent inquiries at the paternal home why Ebenezer did not come to chapel as usual; and the poet says that he passed his Sundays in gathering flowers, that he might make pic-

tures of them; totally unconscious that he was learning the art of poetry in his woodland wanderings. Nay, he then hated poetry, especially that of Pope, which "always gave him the headache." His floral and herbal gatherings soon made him a noted person in his neighbourhood, and people stopped him with his plants to inquire what diseases he was going to cure. Even his wondrous brother Giles, condescended to admire his *Hortus Siccus*; and he had been so long a stranger to the voice of praise, that it sounded sweetly in his ears, and he welcomed it when it came with joy and triumph. About this time, his brother read to him the first book of Thompson's "Seasons," and when he came to the description of the polyanthus and the auricula—"I waited," says Elliott, "impatiently until he had laid down the book; I then took it into the garden, where I compared the description with the living flowers. Here was a new idea! Botany in verse!—a prophecy," he continues, "that the days of scribbling were at hand." The account which he gives of his first essay in verse is interesting enough. It was an imitation in rhyme of Thompson's blank verse thunderstorm. "I knew perfectly well," he writes,

“that sheep could not take flight after being killed, but the rhyme seemed to be of opinion that they should be so described; and as it doggedly abided by this perversity, there was nothing for it but to describe my flock scudding away after the lightning had slain them.” His cousin Benjamin criticised the poem mercilessly, and Elliott never forgave him. This cousin, it seems, was a scholar, and the poet was never so happy as while listening to his recitations of Homer’s Greek—of which, although he did not understand a word—yet after the lapse of nearly half a century, its music had not departed from his soul. He regarded his brother Giles as a prodigy, and became at last painfully alive to his own deficiencies. Giles’s accomplishments stung him into self-instruction; and the misery of his mind at this crisis may be gathered from the fact that he lost his round healthy proportions, and fell into the disease of all students, namely, that of leanness and pale-faced anxiety. He bought a grammar, and studied it laboriously—but could never retain a single rule in his memory. Then he took to the key, and read it through and through, a hundred times. “I found at last,” he says, “that by reflection, and by

supplying elisions, &c., I could detect and correct grammatical errors. At this moment I do not know a single rule in grammar, although I flatter myself I can write English as well as Samuel Johnson could, and detect errors in a greater author—Samuel Bailey.”* His attempt at learning the French language was equally unsuccessful; and his teacher, who seems to have been an incompetent person, got in this instance all the blame.

An accident assisted him much at this period, by placing a number of books at his disposal; and as Elliott confesses that his writings owe something to the list which he furnishes in the text of his Autobiography, section 5th, I shall be pardoned for naming them. They are “Barrow’s Sermons,” “Ray’s Wisdom of God,” “Derham’s Physico Theology,” “Young’s Night Thoughts,” “Hervey’s Meditations,” “Herepin’s Travels,” and three volumes of the “Royal Magazine,” embellished with engravings. “I was never weary,” he says, “of Barrow, and Young taught me to condense.” Shenstone was afterwards a favourite with him, and he thinks that he is now undervalued. The

* S. Bailey, Esq., of Sheffield: Author of “Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions.”

following passage contains a good word to all students. "I never could read a feeble book through; and it follows that I read masterpieces only—the best thoughts of the highest minds; after Milton, Shakspeare, then Ossian, then Junius, with my father's Jacobinism, for a commentary. Paine's Common Sense, Swift's Tale of a Tub, Joan of Arc, Schiller's Robbers, Bürger's Leonora, Gibbon's Decline and Fall, and long afterwards Tasso, Dante, De Stäel, Schlegel, Hazlitt, and the Westminster Review." A strange medley, but valuable as revealing something of the sources of Elliott's peculiarities of writing and thinking.

He complains that his memory sometimes fails him altogether; and yet he almost knew the Bible by heart at twelve years of age, and could repeat, at sixteen, *without missing a word*, the first, second, and sixth books of Paradise Lost.

He is conscious, to a considerable extent, of his own powers, although he does not do full justice to his good angel, and speaks disparagingly of his acknowledged merits and genius. "Time," he says, "has developed in me, *not genius*, but powers which exist in all men, and lie dormant in most. I cannot,

like Byron and Montgomery, pour poetry from my heart as from an unfailing fountain; and of my inability to identify myself, like Shakspeare and Scott, with the character of other men, my abortive ‘Kerhoneh’ and ‘Taurepdes,’ and similar rejected failures, are melancholy instances. My thoughts are all exterior; my mind is the mind of my eyes. A primrose is to me a primrose, and nothing more. I love it because it is nothing more. There is not in my writings one good idea that has not been suggested to me by some real occurrence, or by some object actually before my eyes, or by some remembered object or occurrence, or by the thoughts of other men heard or read.” At the close of his Autobiography he says:—“Newspaper-taught as I am, and having no ideas of my own, I can only seize those of others as they occur, earnestly applying them to current occasions. If I have been mistaken in my objects, I am sorry for it; but I have never advocated any cause without first trying to know the principle on which it was based. On looking back on my public conduct, thanks to the science which poor Cobbett, ever floundering, but great and brave, called in scorn, ‘Polcetical Economy,’ I find I have

had little to unlearn. And when I shall go to my account, and the Great Questioner, whose judgments err not, shall say to me, 'What didst thou with the lent talent?' I can truly answer, 'Lord, it is here, and with it all that I could add to it, doing my best to make *little, much.*' "

Such, in a condensed form, is the account which Elliott gives of his early years. I am warned, however, by his son Francis not to place implicit reliance upon the statements it contains. "I doubt not," he says, "that it is as correct as my father could make it; but he was the unfittest man in the world to write or speak of himself. His estimate of his merits was far below the true one; and he was neither the dunce and simpleton at school, nor the lesser light, paled by the brilliant brother Giles, which he described and believed himself. Giles was a first-rate business man, but he was nothing more; and my father was that, and something more. I am not surprised, however, that his more solid and sterling qualities were but a poor foil to the mortal thrusts, which, in the eyes of his father's household, Giles's brilliance dealt him. All of them homaged and flattered Giles, and my father hid his despised

head in the brightness of his brother's glory. I have always thought that the disparagement which he received from all about him, had much influence in producing that melancholy and love of gloom which through the rest of his life so strongly characterized his mind. At school he fared no better than at home; and unless he was consoled by his almost constant truantings in the woods and fields, his youth must have been one of unrelieved repining and despondency. I am inclined to think, however, that the ambitious lad was happier in so making himself a poet, than he would have been in outshining his schoolfellows in studies distasteful to him."

This statement is further confirmed by Mr. John Fowler, and Mr. Paul Rodgers, of Sheffield, who were both friends of the poet. The latter says: * "Mr. Elliott, in the account of himself recently published in the Athenæum, talks about his own remarkable dulness when a boy. I do not think he is right; in fact, he was no judge at all in the matter. It was rather that his brother's taste and his differed, than that Ebenezer was essentially inferior in any way. I have

* MSS. memoranda of the poet, which will be found in the Appendix.

no doubt he showed as much genius among the modellers and mechanists in the manufactory, as the other did in the shop or the counting-house. Mr. Mark Gregory, then a youth about his own age, and long a workman of Elliott's father's—a man whom Ebenezer always highly esteemed—says he never knew that his young master was dull at anything, but always regarded him as very much the contrary."

Mr. Rodgers likewise gives the following description of the "wondrous brother Giles," who later on in life fell, I regret to add, into intemperate habits, and blighted his own prospects and the hopes which his family had entertained of him:—"He was rather a handsome-faced youth, but lame, went with a limp, and wore a high-heeled shoe. He had very quick parts, and was Ebenezer's acknowledged favourite."

From his sixteenth to his twenty-third year Elliott worked for his father—as laboriously as any servant he had—and without wages, except a shilling or two for pocket money.

His first trial at business, which proved so melancholy in its results, is thus spoken of by his son, from whose letter I have previ-

ously quoted:—"The fortune he received with my mother was invested in a business already bankrupt beyond redemption, and my father went in as a partner with the old firm, consisting of *many* partners, amongst whom was my grandfather. Here he passed several years in hopeless efforts, and hopeless hopes and yearnings, to retrieve the desperate affair. He lost the last penny he had in it; and found an asylum under the roof of my mother's maiden sisters, with whom he spent many months, in a state of wretchedness, which was relieved, however, by the tenderest solicitude for his happiness, on the part of his friends. He endeavoured to beat down despair by writing poems, and painting landscapes in oil, from views in the neighbourhood. But his state of mind will be readily conceived when it is remembered that he was an honest man, a proud man, and possessed of all the sensitiveness which characterizes the poet."

In 1821, when he was forty years of age, he was enabled, chiefly by the affectionate generosity of his wife's sisters, to make another venture in business. He began with a capital of £150, and managed at last to accumulate a fortune; making £20

a day sometimes, without stirring from his counting-house, or ever seeing the goods he disposed of, which exchanged hands as they were landed at the wharf.* His warehouse is described as a small, dingy place, piled all round with bars of iron, having a bust of Shakspeare in the centre of it; and his counting-house contained casts of Achilles, Ajax, and Napoleon. The following anecdote, (the circumstances of which occurred in this warehouse,) illustrative of his attachment to his poorer guests, and of his impatience at insolent behaviour, has been forwarded to me from Sheffield.† “All readers of Elliott,” the writer commences, “will be prepared to learn that a man of such strong passions did not always conduct himself with perfect smoothness, under circumstances of real provocation. No one ever saw *him* guilty of anything like a deliberate, or even thoughtless insult; but in reply to insolence he was always indignant. A friend of mine, in humble life, happening to call at his warehouse in Gibraltar Street, found himself in company there, with a third party,—a

* These, however, were very rare occasions. See Mr. Thomas Lister’s paper upon Elliott, in the Appendix.

† By Mr. Paul Rodgers.

semi-clerical gentleman. Whether this gentleman had a previous pique against my friend, or whether something arose during the conversation which caused a misunderstanding between them, I cannot tell; but from some cause or other, the said gentleman deliberately insulted him. Whereupon, losing all control over himself, Elliott started up, and shouting ‘Away with you! Do my friends come here to be insulted by you?’ seized a broom-stick which was within reach, and dealt his blows on the offender without mercy, not ceasing until he had pursued him into the middle of the street.” This is certainly the most *striking* anecdote which I have been able to gather from the poet’s history; and like that of the old woman who flung the stool at the head of the bishop—in the Scotch kirk—in Charles the First’s time, it sticks very fast to the memory.

Up to the time of Elliott’s second trial of business, in 1821, “he had written,” says his son, “nothing of importance; nothing which gave prophecy of Ebenezer Elliott. But shortly after this event, works of greater pretension to poetic power appeared; and the world had an opportunity—and used it—of disregarding some of the finest poetry

he ever penned, and which it now lauds as such, under other titles, in the poems of 'Love' and 'Night.' Of the 'Giaour,' and 'Scotch Nationality,'* poems of about the same period, I am not able to speak so highly. The one contained first-rate satire, which is never even the worst poetry; and the other an attempt at humour, which was of course a failure—for humour was a faculty which he did not possess."

Many of his poems were written at the request of his friends; and the following deeply interesting letter explains the origin of "The Sinless Cain"—which celebrates the life tragedy of genius:—

"Upperthorpe, 15th Oct. 1835.

"YOUNG LADY,—Your father requested me to write you a poem, and I did so, and called it 'The Sinless Cain.' But you are come into a world filled with dangers, and instead of sending you the poem, I think it better, on the whole, to refer you to it, when it shall appear in some one or other of the Magazines. You will remember that you are the occasion of its having been written. It describes a wretched being who has wandered over the earth, playing various parts, almost all of them sad ones, during more than six thousand

* Vide Appendix.

years. If in after days you chance to meet with him, do not believe that the rags which may clothe him, are the garment of God's indignation. Should he ask you for a pittance, borrow a penny for him, if you have not one. Should he silently implore your pity only, turn not away; for he has a heart that will thank you for a tear, with its last throb. But should he solicit your love, tell him that you once heard of a maiden, who dreaming that she saw and heard a celestial spirit (that had eyes bright as passion, and a voice like that of the woods in spring), loved it with excessive love, but embracing it, found it a corpse!—sweet, indeed, and sadly beautiful, with tears in its eyelids, like a white rose gathered in the dew—but still a corpse! Which, had it never known the touch of mortal passion, might have continued to walk even on the earth, a spirit of life and joy. There is a meaning in all this, which, if you cannot understand, come and learn it from

“EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

“To Miss Rodgers.”

I have already related how the poet became acquainted with Southey, and was cheered on by him; and how, likewise, he was suddenly raised into fame by the publication of the Corn Law Rhymes. It will be interesting to get a personal glimpse of him at this period of his life; and I will, therefore, quote from Mr. Stanton, an American writer, who visited him about this time, and presents us with the following picture both of the poet and his home:—

“I inquired,” says he, “of a young man dressed in a frock besmeared with iron and coal, for the head of the establishment. ‘My father,’ said he, ‘is just gone: you’ll find him at his house yonder.’ I repaired thither. The Corn Law Rhymer stood on the threshold, in his stocking feet, holding a pair of coarse shoes in his hand. His frank ‘walk in’ assured me I was welcome. I had just left the residence of Montgomery. The transition could hardly have been greater—from James Montgomery to Ebenezer Elliott. The former was polished in his manners, exquisitely neat in his personal appearance, and his bland conversation never rose above a calm level, except once, when he spoke with an indignation which years had not abated, of his repeated imprisonment in York Castle, for the publication—first in verse and then in prose—of liberal and humane sentiments, which offended the government. And now I was confronted with a burly ironmonger, rapid in speech, glowing with enthusiasm, putting and answering a dozen questions in a breath; eulogising American republicanism, and denouncing British aristocracy; throwing sarcasms at the Duke of Wellington, and

anointing General Jackson with the oil of flattery; pouring out a flood of racy talk about church establishments, poetry, politics, the price of iron, and the price of corn; while ever and anon he thurst his damp feet in the embers, and hung his shoes on the grate to dry." As his prosperity increased, he took a handsome house in the suburbs of Sheffield, where he could look down upon the smoky chimneys of the town, full of prophetic thoughts, like Teufelsdröck in the "Sartor Resartus." A path at the back of the house led to the hills, and the vale of the Rivelin, about which he loved to sing. Here he entertained all comers right hospitably, attracting around him troops of friends, who listened to his songs and speech as to an oracle.

During the whole of his residence in Sheffield, and indeed throughout life, he identified himself with its interests, took part in all the public concerns of the town, was an active member of the Committee of the Mechanics' Institution, and delivered a course of lectures there, "On Poets and Poetry," some of which were published in Tait's Magazine, and are admirable literary performances.

Mr. Robert Leader, jun., in an article which appeared in *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, December 8th, 1849, gives the following summary of Elliott's political career :—

“In politics, the great object of Mr. Elliott was the abolition of the food monopoly. Some were ready to say that he was a monomaniac on this subject. But he saw that this question lay at the root of all others in regard to politics and national prosperity; that a nation confined to a limited supply of food could never be permanently happy and prosperous; and that a commercial system based on restriction could not be sound. The great cause of Mr. Elliott's rejoicing in the triumph of Reform was the conviction that it must speedily ensure the repeal of the Corn Laws. He soon after formed a local society for promoting this object. But the restoration of transitory prosperity diverted the public mind from the subject, and the Anti-Corn Law agitation failed. Mr. Elliott continued to raise his warning voice, but it was not until 1838 that people could be induced again to move. Then commenced the agitation of the Anti-Corn Law League,

and also that for the Charter. Mr. Elliott had been so much disheartened by the previous apathy shown towards his great subject, that he seemed to lack faith in the sincerity and power of the movement in Manchester. The cotton lords had so long been apathetic that he could not all at once give them credit for having honestly and heartily taken up the cause. He seems to have had more hope in the movement for the Charter, which commenced about the same time, and in which, at first, some influential Birmingham Reformers took part. In September, 1838, Mr. Elliott attended a conference in London, and in the same month he presided at a meeting in Roscoe Fields, when the Charter was first publicly brought forward in Sheffield. But when, in the succeeding January, the Chartists put themselves in opposition at an Anti-Corn Law meeting, Mr. Elliott was found supporting the effort which they opposed. He did not completely separate himself from them, however, till further proof had been given of the desperate nature of the counsels which prevailed among them. When Peter Foden was arrested for sedition in August, 1839, Mr. Elliott,

who seems not to have watched Foden's course, gave bail for him, at the same time reprobating the men who counselled violence. His want of caution was punished, as might fairly have been expected, by the absconding of Foden; and Mr. Elliott's recognizance was estreated. The more complete demonstration of the principles then dominant among the Chartists, which the events of the winter of 1839-40 afforded, seems to have satisfied Mr. Elliott completely, that the Chartist cause was in wrong hands. He continued to aid by his writings the Anti-Corn Law movement, but he felt that with him the time for active personal effort was passed. He retired from business, and from active interference in politics, and left Sheffield in 1841, to spend his last years at Great Houghton, near Barnsley, where he built a house upon a small estate of his own. Many persons have wondered that he took so little part in the operations of the Anti-Corn Law League. We believe the primary cause to have been a conviction that his work was done, and this was not unmingled with a doubt whether it was yet possible to save the country from the anarchy into

which he foresaw that the continuance of monopoly must inevitably plunge it. Becoming interested, too, in rural engagements, being separated from the friends with whom he had been used to converse on public affairs, and left behindhand, as it were, in the current news of the day, he lacked the stimulus to play his accustomed part. During great part of his residence at Great Houghton, he wrote and published little. To various invitations to take part in public affairs, he pleaded the old man's excuse, and gradually withdrew himself."

The following letter, upon the Corn Laws, addressed to Mr. Rodgers, of Sheffield, and dated Houghton Common, May 7th, 1842, is almost a prophecy; and shows the political sagacity and foresight of the poet:—

"Eat each other, said we? Yes! but bare bones are poor picking. I have still the remains of a forlorn hope in the Tories. Peel, I have long thought, understands our position, and will do his best to prevent the coming catastrophe; but he wants moral courage. Wellington does not understand our position; when he does, if ever, he will act boldly on his convictions—perhaps too late.

"But the 'fifty pound tenant-at-will-clause Whigs;—the ballot-refusing Whigs;—the reform-defecting Whigs;

—the monopoly-defending Whigs ;—the Bank Charter-renewing Whigs ;—the Coercion-bill Whigs ; the twenty-million-slave-holder-rewarding Whigs ;—the half-faced, double-faced Whigs ; who could once have saved the State, and would not—can do no good, if willing. Their time is past.

“ EBENEZER ELLIOTT.”

The active part which he took at political meetings in Sheffield, and elsewhere, and the fierce poems and epigrams which he scattered over the land, made him many enemies ; and to such an extent did the virulence of party feeling prevail against him, that when, in 1839, he sought admission to the Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society, the gentlemen members blackballed him ! Elliott, who was fearful lest this transaction, so disgraceful to the parties concerned in it, should damage in its results the Mechanics' Institution—of which he was a member—wrote the following letter to Messrs. Paul Rodgers and John Fowler, members of the Committee, offering to withdraw himself from all active part in its counsels and proceedings. He was the more readily induced to this course, because certain weak minded persons had already taken offence at his remarks upon a late occasion, whilst introducing the Reverend B. Stannus, an

eloquent Unitarian minister of Sheffield, and for many years editor of the *Sheffield Iris*—a paper originally started by James Montgomery, the poet—to the audience, preparatory to the delivery, by that gentleman, of a lecture “On Burns.” The letter runs thus :

“ Sheffield, 11th March, 1839.

“ To Messrs. Paul Rodgers and John Fowler.

“ In my old age, I have got the heart-ache. The few words with which I introduced Mr. Stannus, I am told offended influential friends, or foes, of the institution. Certainly, when I said he would show that ‘ tow hacklers have souls,’ I forgot that not one in fifty of my hearers knew that poor Burns had been a tow hackler. You at least will not suspect me of trying to injure the Institution. Besides, you know, if tow hacklers have souls, cutters and grinders have ! This may be a scandal, but the conclusion seems inevitable. You are aware how unwilling I am to come forward on any public occasion, and that I never do so but from a wish to be useful. All the misfortunes of the Institution, it is said, are owing to two or three infidels, of whom I am the worst. It tortures me to hear it said that no institution can stand, if I am known to support it. They err, however, who think that I am an irreligious man. I know more of the Book than some persons who live by it. Having studied the evidence on both sides of the question, I am a Christian from conviction, and because I cannot help it. But would it not be better, not to elect me to any office in the Institution ? I could then mingle with

the audience, and should not offend by my seeming presumption. There would then be no drawback on my efforts to serve the Institution; and no loss could be sustained, as I am useless on committees, and worse than useless in the chair.

“Might I suggest to Mr. Fowler, that in moving a vote of thanks to Mr. Stannus, it would be well to say something to the following purport. In Mr. Stannus’s first lecture, he told us that we have to thank John Knox for the schools and the educational systems of Scotland. How much, then, does the world owe to John Knox? He sowed the fire-seeds which, growing into a flame, enabled the English Puritans, not long afterwards, to kindle another flame, that seems destined to enlighten the whole earth. But for him, and the schools of Scotland, perhaps, there would not have been in the world, at this day, a shadow or a dream of public liberty. The mention of a fact so honourable to John Knox, connected as it is with a similar fact in the history of Burns, who established the first Scotch book-club, shows what a mighty educational engine public lecturing may become; and so long as one person can be found to give lectures, splendid as those which have been heard from the reverend gentleman, I for one, will not despair of the Sheffield Mechanics’ Institution. It stands yet; and if the edifice of society is to stand, such institutions must not fall. If this country is to escape ruin, it will not be by monopolizing ignorance.

* * * * *

Now don’t suppose that I should not have written this letter if the philosophers had not blackballed me. I should not care a straw for a hogshhead full of their black balls, unless they were black peas, and I had permission to feed a pig with them.”

Elliott was at this time amongst the highest subscribers to the funds of the Institution ; and he manifested his attachment to the cause of Popular Education by his own labours therein, and by the counsel which he gave to others respecting it. Altogether, he was not only a good poet, but a good citizen, and a true patriot. From the beginning to the end of his life, there was not a blot or flaw upon his character. His attention to his business was almost proverbial ; and although many of his poems were written in his counting-house, he never allowed his genius to interfere with his bread. He was deeply loved by the higher class of artizans in Sheffield, who read and appreciated his poems ; whilst the middle classes, as a whole, never understood him, and can scarcely be said, even now, to be acquainted with his works. The lower orders of the town knew him only as a politician, and public speaker ; and it frequently happened, whilst upon the platform or hustings, that he was carried away by the force of his own thoughts into a complete forgetfulness of the conventional uses of language. On more than one occasion he has shocked the propriety of his hearers, and of the

town at large, by the utterance of forbidden words, whilst speaking upon the ultimate consequences of the Corn Laws, of which he was at the time totally unconscious. He was so absorbed in his subject that he forgot to dress it in decent costume; and from these and similar causes sprang the prejudice which ordinary people conceived against him.

Nevertheless, he was a brave, high-minded, and noble person; one of the few men who come to us across the centuries, and restore our faith in man and manful action. His whole life was a poem, an epic that closed with the demolition of the Corn Laws.

His prosperity at Sheffield was interrupted by the panic of 1837; and the subsequent commercial revolution, caused by the operation of the Corn Laws—against which he was still fighting—swept away a great part of his earnings. “I lost fully one-third of my savings,” he says, “and after enabling my six boys to quit the nest, got out of the fracas with about £6000, which I will try to keep.” He now left his villa, near Sheffield, and retired to Hargate Hill, near Great Houghton, where he built a good substantial house, suitable

to his family and resources. In an interesting letter which he wrote to Mr. Tait, of Edinburgh, after he was quietly domiciled in his new abode, he relates all the particulars of the purchase, and gives an account of the fortunes and prospects of his children, which I will here extract:—

“My eldest son, Ebenezer, whom you saw at Sheffield, is a clergyman of the establishment, being at Lothedale, near Skipton, on a salary of about £140 per annum, and a house better far than mine, rent free. He has married a lady of great merit, who has a fortune of a hundred a year, made safe to herself, and which is in Chancery. Perhaps a more simple-mannered, unassuming man never lived. He is no poet, and yet there is a touch of the poetic in all he does or suffers. If he opens his snuff-box to a stranger, he spills the snuff of course; and he gets on best when he stumbles. His mother thinks he has some resemblance to me.

“My son Benjamin, unwarned by his father’s losses, is carrying on a steel trade at Sheffield, in my old premises, where (as he thinks, poor fellow! for he is a great hopper,) he has some prospect; in

any other country he would already have made an independency. He endures privations such as no man of his pretensions ought to endure anywhere, and such as no man will here endure if free trade be obtained before all is lost. He is a fine young man, upwards of six feet high, of superior abilities, and the highest moral worth; but, alas! not unindebted to his grandmother!

“My sons Henry and Francis (as I wish them to do) are living as bachelors on the interest of money earned and saved by themselves, and increased by gifts from me. Henry is tall, handsome, and mechanical; he ought to have been apprenticed to engineering. Francis is tall and good-looking, but he has the misfortune to be a born poet; for my mother has transmitted to him, through me, her nervous constitution and body-consuming sensibilities. Is poetic genius, then, a disease? My seventh son, Edwin, is a clergyman of the established church, for which he may be almost said to have educated himself, and into which he has won his way by his own efforts. Less assisted by me than any of my other sons, he is now a rector in the West Indies, where

he has, I am told, a better income than I have been able to secure after all my toils. He is a Lytton-Bulwer-looking person, not unlike a well-grown young clergy-justice, with forehead enough for three. At school he was remarkable for laughing hostility into kindness—a favourite wherever he went. We always called him the gentleman of the family. Having observed, when quite a youth, that fine folks ride, he broke open his thrift-box, and with the contents (after drawing tears and kisses from his mother) bought an ass of a Tory's son (all his associates were Tories,) who sold it because it was starving. Edwin knew that he had nothing for it to eat; but the ass, accustomed to hope in despair, had expectations. It commenced business at my place in Burgus Street, by thrusting its lean neck through the kitchen window and eating a pound of butter. The servant lass, suspecting it to be a thief, kicked it into the street. From the street it got into the fields, and thence into the pin-fold. To prevent the lad's heart from breaking, I paid seven shillings and sixpence for trespass, and released the famished creature. What then was to be done? Mark the difference between the Tories and the toried! At last,

after various efforts in stock-feeding, I made a present of it to a small manufacturing freeholder, who always voted blue. He fattened it by night in his neighbour's field, and then sold it to him for two guineas.

“My poor son John, the weakling—kind-hearted, intelligent, five feet four inches high, and almost blind—is druggisting at Sheffield, in a sort of chimney called a shop, for which he pays £40 a year. He is engaged, almost without a moment's pause, from seven in the morning until ten at night, in dealing out halfpenny-worths of drugs; yet I, who have been accustomed to sell goods by tons, think that he is as likely to thrive as most of his neighbours, and believe that there are thousands of persons in Sheffield who would gladly change places with him. But what can our constitution be worth, if it should turn out at last that my sons Henry and Francis, living poorly on the interest of their earnings, are wiser in their generation than the trade-troubled? The worst I wish the Dukes of Richmond and Buckingham is, that they may be forced, in my time, to earn their living as my sons Benjamin and John earn theirs. Old as I am, I would engage to hop a mile without

changing leg, or die rather than not, to see them at it; for to their unholy legislation, I impute it, that of my six sons, the only two who could afford to marry may be said to be maintained by the labour of others.

“Of my thirteen children, five are gone—William, Thomas, Charles, and the two unchristened ones. They left behind them no memorial, and the old inscription has departed from the grave of Charles. But they are safe in the bosom of mercy, and not yet quite forgotten even here.”

We have now before us the leading features in the external life of the poet. As a boy, he was dull, idle, and incapable of learning the simplest rudiments of education. Up to his thirteenth year he does not manifest a single faculty from which his future greatness might be augured. His affection for his mother is the only redeeming quality which he seems to have possessed. For although, he says, he cannot remember when he was not fond of ruralities, one can scarcely call his endless truantings a manifestation of his love for Nature. It was vagabondism, induced by shame, not unmixed with sorrow, at his

own wilful ignorance. Still, the forms of Nature impressed themselves upon his soul in these wild, woodland ramblings, and remained there in dumb pictury, until he was able to reproduce them in song. I notice, likewise, that he never forgets a single vision of Nature; and that all her phenomena and beautiful creatures range themselves round his mind as if he was the sole centre of the universe. The kingfisher flying over the waters of the Don is remembered through the darkness of fifty years; and the lonely and solemn night, with its flaming stars and meteors, is the unforgotten canopy of his Hejira into the land of the great Pan. The nightingales in Bassingthorpe Wood; the snake which waited for him on the sunny Sabbath mornings at the top of Primrose Lane, are all related to him, and flow towards him by the law of polarity. They are waiting to be sung; although he is unconscious of that deep underlying faculty which they are gradually and silently awakening within him. The botanical book, and the specimens of dry plants, which he saw at his aunt's, gave the first quickening impulse to his mind and genius.

Up to this time he had been a frequent visitor at the York Keelman; was drunk, even, a few days before this memorable visit to his aunt's cottage; but now, when he found he had talents, could admire, and, by mechanical process, draw the flowers, in the botanical book, he was lifted three feet all at once above his ale-house companions; and for the first time in his life the good demon opened the windows of his soul, and gave him a glimpse of the wonders and beauties of the universe. Then followed the impressions made upon him on hearing his brother Giles read that first book of Thomson's Seasons—his comparison of the poetical description of the flowers with the flowers themselves; and the new idea which burst upon him of *Botany in Verse*! Afterwards, we find him rambling for a purpose, mysteriously collecting plants, for the cure of diseases the people thought, and thought truly, although the diseases were not such as they imagined. Then Homer's Greek turns all his thoughts into melody; and at last he attempts his rhymed thunder-storm, where the sheep are represented running away after they were killed by

lightning, *because the rhyme would have it so*; and thus, by slow and imperceptible degrees, was the mind of the poet developed; and thus he sought to break the chains of his spirit, and uplift the awful veil of Nature. He served, however, a long apprenticeship to his art before he produced anything worthy of a place in the Pantheon of literature. Twenty years elapsed between the publication of "The Vernal Walk," and that of "The Corn Law Rhymes;" and although these are by no means his best performances, yet they won for him a name, which led to an appreciation by the public of those higher books which he had written in the interim alluded to. From the first his muse was wedded to politics and to social wrong. These, indeed, were the materials from which his inspiration was drawn, and he found in them the region of his work and power. Hence, he never loses sight of his mission, but with the jealous eye and vehement soul of a Prophet and Reformer, labours without ceasing for its accomplishment. He is of all other men, the Man of his age. Such scars are upon the face of this old warrior—such lightnings in his eyes—such thunder and

terror upon his brow—yet, withal such pity and womanly tenderness—such musical pathos in his heart, and all so strangely and inextricably woven in his nature and radiating his person, that were I to meet him a thousand years hence, in the most out-of-the-way corner of Heaven, I should recognize him in spite of his celestial raiment, and rejoice with him that life was at last swallowed up in victory.

I must not omit, before proceeding to the final division of my subject, to quote in this place, a short and characteristic note, written to the editor of *The Sheffield Independent*, by James Montgomery, the sole remaining poet now, in the town of fire and steel, upon the subject of this paper:—

“I do not remember having ever been for an hour in Mr. Elliott’s company. Our occasional meetings were few, and short, and far between, though he was known and admired by me as a poet, before the world would either know or honour him as such. He published several small volumes, at intervals, the manuscripts of which (mostly) he had confidentially submitted to me; and they had my best encouragement, on the ground of their merit; but not one of these could

command public attention till he broke out in 'The Corn Law Rhymes,' as Waller said of Denham, 'like the Irish Rebellion, *forty thousand strong, when nobody thought of such a thing.*' Then, indeed, he compelled both astonishment and commendation from all manner of critics: Whig, Tory, and Radical reviewers vieing with each other who should magnanimously extol the talents which they had either not discovered, or had superciliously overlooked, till, for their own credit, they could no longer hold their peace, or affect to despise what they had not had heart to acknowledge, when their countenance would have done service to the struggling author. A few of his masterpieces did find their way into the *Iris*, but I believe these were all republished by himself in his successive miscarrying volumes. I, however, am quite willing to hazard any critical credit by avowing my persuasion, that in originality, power, and even beauty, when he chose to be beautiful,—he might have measured heads beside Byron in tremendous energy, Crabbe in graphic description, and Coleridge in effusions of domestic tenderness; while in intense sympathy with the poor, in whatever he deemed their wrongs or their

sufferings, he excelled them all,—and perhaps everybody else among contemporaries, in prose or verse. He was, in a transcendental sense, *the Poet of the Poor*, whom, if not always ‘*wisely*,’ I at least dare not say, he loved ‘*too well*.’ His personal character, his fortunes, and his genius, would require, and they deserve a full investigation, as furnishing an extraordinary study of human nature.”

The allusions made by Montgomery, in the above letter, to Elliott’s “*Effusions of Domestic Tenderness*,” and to his “intense” sympathy with the people, cannot be better illustrated than by the following poems:—

THE DYING BOY TO THE SLOE BLOSSOM.

“ BEFORE thy leaves thou comest once more,
White blossom of the sloe !
Thy leaves will come as heretofore ;
But this poor heart, its troubles o’er,
Will then lie low.

A month at least before thy time
Thou comest, pale flower, to me ;
For well thou know’st the frosty rime
Will blast me, ere my vernal prime,
No more to be.

Why here in winter? No storm lowers
O'er Nature's silent shroud!
But blithe larks meet the sunny showers,
High o'er the doomed untimely flowers
In beauty bowed.

Sweet violets, in the budding grove,
Peep where the glad waves run;
The wren below, the thrush above,
Of bright to-morrow's joys and love
Sing to the sun.

And where the rose-leaf, ever bold,
Hears bees chant hymns to God,
The breeze-bowed palm, mossed o'er with gold,
Smiles on the well, in summer cold,
And daisied sod.

But thou, pale blossom, thou art come,
And flowers in winter blow,
To tell me that the worm makes room
For me, her brother, in the tomb,
And thinks me slow.

For as the rainbow of the dawn
Foretells an eve of tears,
A sunbeam on the saddened lawn,
I smile, and weep to be withdrawn
In early years.

Thy leaves will come; but songful spring
Will see no leaf of mine;
Her bells will ring, bride's-maids sing,
When my young leaves are withering
Where no suns shine.

O might I breathe morn's dewy breath,
When June's sweet Sabbaths chime !
But thine before my time, O death !
I go where no flower blossometh,
Before my time.

Even as the blushes of the morn
Vanish, and long ere noon,
The dewdrop dieth on the thorn,
So fair I bloomed ; and was I born
To die as soon ?

To love my mother and to die—
To perish in my bloom ;
Is this my sad brief history ;
A tear dropped from a mother's eye
Into the tomb.

He lived and loved—will sorrow say—
By early sorrow tried :
He smiled, he sighed, he past away ;
His life was but an April day—
He loved and died !

My mother smiles, then turns away,
But turns away to weep :
They whisper round me—what they say
I need not hear, for in the clay
I soon must sleep.

Oh, love is sorrow ! sad it is
To be both tried and true ;
I ever trembled in my bliss ;
Now there are farewells in a kiss—
They sigh adieu.

But woodbines flaunt when blue bells fade,
Where Don reflects the skies ;
And many a youth in Shirecliff's shade
Will ramble where my boyhood played,
Though Alfred dies.

Then panting woods the breeze will feel,
And bowers, as heretofore,
Beneath their load of roses reel ;
But I through woodbined lanes shall steal
No more, no more.

Well, lay me by my brother's side,
Where late we stood and wept ;
For I was stricken when he died—
I felt the arrow as he sighed
His last, and slept."

The above poem needs no comment ; and the following, entitled "The People's Anthem," will show what Montgomery means by Elliott's love for the people.

“ WHEN wilt thou save the people ?
Oh, God of Mercy ! when ?
Not kings and lords, but nations !
Not thrones and crowns, but men !
Flowers of thy heart, oh God, are they,
Let them not pass like weeds away !
Their heritage a sunless day !
God save the people !

Shall crime bring crime for ever,—
Strength aiding still the strong ?
Is it thy will, oh Father,
That men shall toil for wrong ?
‘ No ! ’ say thy mountains ; ‘ No ! ’ thy skies ;
‘ Man’s clouded sun shall brightly rise
And songs be heard instead of sighs.’
God save the people !

When wilt thou save the people ?
Oh, God of Mercy ! when ?
The people, Lord ! the people !
Not thrones and crowns, but men !
God save the people ! thine they are,
Thy children, as thy angels fair :
Save them from bondage, and despair ?
God ! save the people.’ ”

Reminiscences of the Poet.

PART III.

REMINISCENCES OF THE POET IN HIS RETIREMENT AT HARGATE HILL.

It only now remains for me to speak of the poet in his retirement at Hargate Hill, and present a picture of his private life. And as I design to give personal reminiscences of him, I hope I shall not incur the charge of egotism, if, in the execution of my purpose, I shall find it necessary to take a more prominent part than I could otherwise wish or consent to. At all events, egotism is very far from my intention. I have thought the matter well over, however, and do not see how I could better render justice to my subject, than by adopting the plan I have chosen; and with this explanation will address myself forthwith to the work before me.

Hargate Hill is about eight miles from Barnsley, and three from Darfield Station, on the North Midland Railway. "I chose

this place," says the poet,* "for its beauty, which, as is usual in affairs of the heart, is invisible to all but the enamoured. Rising early one morning, I took a beautiful walk of eighteen miles, through parks, wild lanes, and footpaths; reached the place; liked it; and returning the same day, resolved to buy it. Supposing the cottage, which stood upon it, to be worth £60, I gave £180 for the land, say £18 per acre. It was a wild land, having being a wood, and fox cover; called on the maps Argilt Hill, or wood. I have laid out upon it, land and all, about a thousand guineas. My establishment," he continues, "is illustrious for a St. Bernard's dog, and a Welsh pony, 'the observed of all observers,' which in its green old age of twenty years, draws a small gig; both untaxed. Gig, harness, and mare, cost altogether £8. 10s. My family here consists of Mrs. Elliott, my two daughters, or rather one daughter, for they keep house for one of my sons at Sheffield in turn,—a servant maid, and a man who works for me occasionally. Rid the Corn Laws, and I shall not be without dim visions of a flunkey."

It is a lovely walk from Darfield Station

* In a letter previously quoted, addressed to Mr. Tait.

up to the poet's house, and the surrounding country is of an undulating, quiet, and pastoral character. The road runs through thick hedges and tall trees; with wide, green pastures on either side of it, where sheep and oxen graze in undisturbed tranquillity. I have many beautiful recollections of this old green road, with its musical birds and flowers; its cool brooks, and shadowy outline of trees, falling in sunny mosaics upon the pathway. I remember, too, the wild roses and the honeysuckles which grew upon the hedges; especially the latter, whose "clustered trumpets," as Elliott calls them, seemed to be blowing anthems of incense upon the morning air, to the praise of the Great Creator. For it always happened in my summer visits to Elliott that the days were fine and sunny; so that I look back upon them as Sabbaths consecrated to the genius of friendship and poetry.

After walking about two miles through this fine country, you come to Great Houghton, a long and straggling village, chiefly remarkable for an old dilapidated hall, from which Wentworth, Lord Strafford, married his third wife, and where he lived for some time afterwards. It is a fine old

ruin; and I remember with what interest I regarded it, on my first visit in that direction, to the poet. It was very early one summer's morning, and long before I arrived at the village, I saw the grey massy building looming through the sunny mists, and presently, beheld its grotesque gables, and projecting windows. There was such an antique look about the place, that I could have imagined myself, for the moment, drawn suddenly back into the middle ages. A nearer approach, however, dissipated the illusion; for it was soon evident that the old glory had departed from its walls, and with it the ancient spirit of its chivalrous owners. At the end of the field enclosing it on the west, which it was evident enough, from the scattered elms and chesnut trees, had once been a park, hung a wooden gate upon two stone pillars, formerly a chief entrance to the mansion. A stone wall ran from this gate to the mansion itself; and upon an inspection of the front, I found it was converted into an inn, where provender was furnished to man and beast for money. I opened the great door and entered the house; for Elliott had frequently desired me to in-

spect the old mansion, and named it with pride, as the most interesting historic ruin in his neighbourhood. A large fire was blazing up the huge chimney, and the landlady was washing her chubby-faced children in an earthen pancheon, before it. A servant girl brought me a cup of milk, and asked if I would not like a drop of rum in it. The landlord, who was dressed in a velveteen shooting jacket, and corduroy breeches, was quietly devouring his hot toast and tea; whilst a braw fellow, who had brought a team of horses from Sheffield, was regaling himself on the oak settle, with a pint of beer. I enquired how the house came to be in such a dilapidated condition, and the landlord told me that the steward of the property had frequently promised to patch up the old rooms, and make them habitable for him and his family—but always forgot to keep his word. The roof was quite rotten, he said, from neglect; and he could not afford to repair it himself, out of the profits of the little farm he rented. And to this complexion, thought I, has the pride of Wentworth come at last! The lofty rooms, and tracery on the oaken beams and wainscots, seemed to mock the vulgarity and

poverty of their present occupiers; and I could not help thinking that so fine a building—with its rich historic memories—might have been devoted to a better purpose than that of an alehouse. Having obtained permission, I wandered over the hall, up massy stone staircases; into large rooms lighted by magnificent windows; along twilight galleries, where old family pictures, instinct with life, were wont to stare from the walls upon observing visitors, in the dim times that are gone. Here were dark antechambers; the floors all rotten, and breaking into dust beneath the foot; and there were others well lighted, and looking out upon a fair and beautiful country, over which the sun shone as brightly as in Strafford's proudest and happiest days. But Strafford himself, and his third wife, and all their retainers, where were they? The eastern part of the building is a mere ruin. The walls are dismantled, and have fallen in in some places, leaving nothing to be seen but broken staircases and mouldering stones, where the ivy clings, and the bat and the owl inhabit. Elliott, in speaking of this old hall to a friend, who reports his last

visit to him in an interesting paper which appeared in a late number of "Eliza Cook's Journal," says: "after Wentworth's time it became the property of Sir William Rhodes, a stout Presbyterian and Parliamentary. When the Civil War broke out, Rhodes took the field with his tenantry, on the side of the Parliament, and the first encounter between the two parties is said to have taken place only a few miles to the north of Old Houghton. While Rhodes was at Tadcaster, with Sir Thomas Fairfax, Captain Grey, (an ancestor of the present Earl Grey,) at the head of a body of about three hundred royalist horse, attacked the old hall, and there being only some thirty servants left to defend it, took the place and set fire to it, destroying all that would burn. But Cromwell rode down the Cavaliers with his ploughmen at Marston Moor, not very far from here either, and then Rhodes built the little chapel that you will see still standing at the west end of the hall, and established a godly Presbyterian divine to minister there; forming a road from thence to Driffeld, about three miles off, to enable the inhabitants of that place to reach it by a short and convenient route.

I forget how it happened, (continued the poet,) I believe it was by marriage—but so it was—that the estate fell into the possession in these latter days, of Monckton Milnes, the poet's father, to whom it belongs."

Resting myself awhile after I had explored the dusty chambers and ruins of the hall, I resumed my walk through Great Houghton village, about half a mile from which, at the top of a hill, stands the poet's house. And as I ascended from the valley, I heard afar off the well-known bark of the great St. Bernard's dog already alluded to, as one of the notable appendages to Elliott's establishment. The red marly road led me under beautiful shady trees, up to Houghton Common, which spread out with its blossoming gorse bushes, like a sea of gold and emeralds. On the right hand there was a farm-house, with great stacks piled up on one side of it, and a little cluster of trees in the background; and on the left, fenced in from the common by a good and substantial stone wall, stood Elliott's villa. Here I turned off upon the gravel road leading to the large blue gates, and entered the poet's grounds, where I was saluted by the great shaggy dog

whose bark I had heard below. He came at me with a bound, wagging his huge tail, and jumping with his paws upon my shoulder he thrust his friendly snout into my face. I entered the garden, and soon stood within the porch of the door. It was about nine o'clock, and I remained awhile to listen, for I heard the sound of musical voices within, accompanied by the piano-forte. It was soon evident that the whole family were engaged in singing those beautiful matins; and I heard the poet's voice mingling its plaintive wailings with the general harmony. I walked into the hall, took off my hat and coat, and suddenly presented myself in the sitting-room. There was a general exclamation of surprise, joy, and welcome. The poet advanced first to shake me by the hand, flinging his spectacles over his shaggy brows, whilst his blue eyes were lighted up as with the sunshine of all the worlds. It was something to feel the warm grip of that manly hand, and to hear the kind, hearty, and hospitable words that accompanied it. Nor was it less pleasant to be greeted by the good wife and fair daughter, who constituted at that time the little household at Hargate. I shall never forget that morning. The warm sunshine streamed into

the room from the open casement, as we sat at breakfast, and the sweet roses looked through the window-panes, smiling upon the happy group within. An open canary cage stood upon a table under the window, and the pretty yellow warbler sang its richest song all breakfast time, flying across the room at intervals, and settling with loving wings upon the head of the venerable poet. Then we had a pleasant conversation about the beautiful country that lay around us, with its dark woods, valleys, dells, and moorlands; and the poet related to me all the local traditions and histories, which he had gathered from the "Deanery of Doncaster," and other sources. He spoke of two great oaks about a mile from his house, where the Wapentake assembled in ancient times, and where, in the hollow of one of them, Nevison, the celebrated highwayman, used to secrete himself when in danger. He likewise related the history of Nevison, who was born at Wortley in Charles the Second's time, and knew the site of the public-house where he was at last captured: "A heart-breaking story, I have no doubt," said Elliott, in speaking of it, "for the daughter of the innkeeper was Nevison's sweetheart." The site of this

house is at Ringstone Hill, otherwise celebrated as the place where Sir Godfrey Rhodes assembled the first troop in the parliamentary war. He spoke likewise of South Kirby—a little village about two and a half miles off—as interesting to him from the fact that there the Rev. George Beaumont lived as vicar, who was tried and executed February 18th, 1648, for holding correspondence with Colonel Morris, who had surprised Pontefract Castle for the King. Pope's mother was born also in his neighbourhood, he said, viz., at Marrow Thorn, although it was nearer Barnsley than Hargate. Her maiden name was Edith Turner, and the registry of her birth is dated the 18th of June, 1649. These historical facts were deeply interesting to him, and he loved to relate them to his friends and visitors. I shall not soon forget the indignation with which he spoke of one Thomas Gargrave, who, at the age of thirty-four, was hanged, for burning a poor servant boy of his in an oven at Great Houghton.

When breakfast was over, the poet related to me many incidents in his early life, and spoke of his ramblings around Sheffield, as the most beautiful of all his memories. The hill above the old Park Wood, where the

scene of the Ranter's last sermon is placed, was a favourite haunt of his; and he heard the sound of the many voiced rivers—the Don, the Loxley, Ewden, Rivelin, Sheaf, and Porter—like the songs of innumerable Syrens, singing to him for ever, and cheering him in his Hargate solitude. His love for these beautiful streams had grown into a passion, which was increased by his long absence from them; and whilst alluding to them on the morning in question, he repeated the following “Farewell to Rivelin”—which he had written previous to his leaving Sheffield:—

“Beautiful River! Goldenly shining
Where, with the cistus, Woodbines are twining,
(Birklands around thee, Mountains above thee,)
Rivelin wildest! Do I not love thee?

Why do I love thee, Heart-breaking River?
Love thee, and leave thee? Leave thee for ever!
Never to see thee, Where the storms greet thee!
Never to hear thee, Rushing to meet me!

Never to hail thee, Joyfully chiming
Beauty in music, Sister of Wyming!
Playfully mingling Laughter and sadness,
Ribbledin's sister! Sad in thy gladness.

Oh, when thy poet, Weary reposes,
Coffin'd in slander, Far from thy roses,
Tell slave and tyrant (Heart-breaking River!)
Tell them I loved thee, Love thee for ever!"

He was, however, well satisfied with his present position. "People," he said, "laughed at me for buying this little estate, and thought I should soon die of *ennui*, so far removed as I am from friends, companions, and the conveniences of civilization. But they were all mistaken. I am happy with my family and books; and spend my time in laying out my garden, planting trees, walking, driving, reading, writing. I envy no man, nor have I any right to do so. This is not an unlovely neighbourhood (he added) for a poet in his old age, as I will prove to you before you return. And in the meanwhile, look out of the window, and tell me what you think of the view from it." I did so, and found that the poet had made artificial openings in the trees which bounded the croft beyond the garden, through which the best pictures of the landscape were visible. Here were the hall and village of Great Houghton, and the dim landscape beyond it; and a little to the right, far off, through another opening of foliage, lay the manufac-

turing villages of Swinton and Wath;* and nearer in the valley, the beautiful church of Darfield looked over the quiet scenery towards the poet's house, backed by the woods of Wentworth, through which the monuments of Hooper Stand, Needles' Eye, and Smoothing Iron, shot gleaming in the sunshine, whilst a line of dark hills bounded the horizon. "Confess now," said the poet, "that I have not made a foolish choice, in coming up here to live." Shortly afterwards, at my request, he read to me some of his unpublished poems. These were written in a large folio book, which he kept in a wooden box, on one side the piano. He repeated, likewise, several melodies which he had adapted to some of our national airs, and I afterwards had the pleasure of joining his daughter in singing them. In this way we beguiled several hours, and then took a short ramble over the moor, and through the fields and woods, conversing by the way, of the aspects and tendencies of the age, and of the truly great men now living amongst us. In the political sphere, Cobden was his idol. He called him the Hero of the Bloodless Revolution;—the golden-mouthed orator,

* Earthenware is the staple manufacture of these villages.

whose plainest words rang with music, and whose eloquence, at once simple, powerful, earnest, argumentative, and convincing, was the most wonderful which ancient or modern times could boast of. "I look to Cobden," he said, "as the leader of the Advance Body Guard of Man! Great as the Corn Law Battle was, and incalculably great as it will be in its results, Cobden will yet effect another revolution as great as that. He will destroy monopoly in all its forms; and by reducing our taxation, he will rid the country of its titled paupers, and enable the working man not only to eat cheap bread, but to possess a comfortable home—to educate his children—to live *as a man!*" He named Bright, too, as a fiery and energetic speaker and actor, but intellectually considered, as a Melancthon leaning upon the bosom of Luther. Of Lord John Russell and the Whigs he had no hope, and spoke of them in contemptuous and not very polite language. But he respected Sir Robert Peel, and regretted that he had "retired from business." I have previously shown, in an extract from one of his letters, that he had all but prophesied, ten years before the event took place, that Sir Robert would repeal

the Corn Laws, as soon as he understood the true commercial position of England; "and now," he said, "we want Sir Robert to execute his own measures; for we have not got Free Trade yet, and when we do get it, we shall have hard work to keep it." Speaking of Colonel Thompson—the brave Reformer and accomplished scholar—he called him the Prince of Politicians; and said that every letter of the Corn Law Catechism ought to be printed in gold, and read once a day on Sundays from every pulpit in the land. For this book was Elliott's gospel; and I am not quite sure that he did not go to heaven with it in his hand. He will read it there to Bentham, as he advised Tennyson, when he died, to read Longfellow's "Evangeline" to Homer.

I ventured to allude to the neglect with which he had been treated by his own party, as a sort of probe which I thought might reach him; but he had no bitterness in his heart against his quondam associates, and fellow-workers. "I am no longer wanted," he said; "I have done my work, and can die, when God calls me; thankful that the battle is over, and the 'good time coming.'"
We were now in the midst of a wood,

wandering knee-deep in blue bells, whilst the birds were singing merrily around us. "These," he said, pointing to the flowers, and trees, and birds, "are my companions; from them I derive consolation and hope, for Nature is all harmony and beauty, and man will one day be like her, and the war of castes and the war for bread will be no more." And then he stooped down, and gathering a flower, placed it affectionately in my hand, and bade me keep it in remembrance of that day's ramble. "For," he added, with the most touching emphasis of voice, "when these old woods are brown with their autumnal attire, I shall, in all probability, be at rest in the grave."

The afternoon of that day was spent in walking up and down the grass-plot before the house, where we continued our morning's conversation, interrupted occasionally by the St. Bernard's dog, who seemed to be jealous of my monopoly of the poet, and came to ask for his wonted caresses. We were sometimes joined likewise by Mrs. Elliott and her daughter, who, when they had heard enough of our politics, retired amongst the flowers, and left us alone in the full glory of debate. It is well known

that Elliott was a redoubted champion of competition, and that he looked upon communism as fatal to the best interests of man; as a system where *Do-nothing* was to have all, with George Sand for a king.* It is related of him that walking once in company with a leading Socialist of Sheffield, discussing this subject, they came to a sudden turn of the road, which revealed a number of willow trees in a meadow, all recently cut into one uniform shape. At this strange and unexpected sight Elliott extended his

* Elliott's Epigram, which he called "Bully Idle's Prayer," will convey a good idea of his hatred of communism, and of his unfairness also in dealing with the great problem which *communism* has opened up to modern enquiry. Here it is:—

“ Lord, send us weeks of Sundays ;
A Saint's day, every day ;
Shirts gratis, ditto breeches,
No work, and double pay ;
Tell Short and Long they're both short now ;
To Slow and Fast one meed allow ;
Let Louis Blanc take Ashley's cow,
And Richmond give her hay.”

A letter by Isaac Ironside, of Sheffield, respecting this epigram will be found in the Appendix, and will be read, I think, with interest.

arms, and cried aloud, "Behold a society of ready-made Socialists!" He was apt enough at this work, and never let slip a good opportunity of illustrating his arguments by such casual examples as fell in his way. His hatred of communism, however, blinded him, as usual, to the whole merits of the subject, which he had never studied, and which he said was not worth studying. George Sand was his Mother of Harlots in the new régime; and he called Louis Blanc the fit legislator of an infernal Noodledom. He regarded the communistic tendencies of the age as the most death-like sign, which, if not arrested would plunge the nation into anarchy, confusion, and ruin. No argument drawn from the anomalies of our social state, could convince him that Capital had not a right to rule the world, according to the law of supply and demand; and no horrible Irish famine; no criminal statistics; no facts of daily starvation; no revelation of fever cellars—of starving needlewomen making shirts at 4d. a day, and that they might not die, compelled to the most pitiable, sorrowful degradation—(such as one cannot think of without tears and agony)—I say none of these things could move Elliott one inch

from his political doctrine, or make him doubt for a moment that competition was the great social law of God, destined to rule the world to the end of time. Neither would he admit the validity of the higher argument drawn from the Christian precepts, in favour of co-operation. Free trade, he said, would give us all we wanted of material wealth; and education would gradually introduce a better feeling, and a kinder understanding between masters and men. Not that Elliott was impassible to the sufferings of the classes we have alluded to; for it is notorious, that he was keenly alive to them. It was as a poet, however, not as a political economist. In the former capacity he would have died to save them; in the latter, he could have seen the earth filled with graves, rather than have abandoned it to poor Dudevant, "Ashley's Cow," and Louis Blane.

Returning once more to the Corn Law Agitation he said, "You spoke this morning about the neglect which you imagined me to have received at the hands of the old League; and you are not perhaps aware that the League itself originated in Sheffield; and that the Anti-Corn Law Association com-

menced the crusade against monopoly, and engaged Paulton as their lecturer." He likewise claimed for himself the honour of having given the first decided impulse to the movement, and by his songs, epigrams, and satires, prepared the way for the reception of the Anti-Corn Law doctrines. He spoke, too, with great and pardonable pride upon his position with respect to the Corn Law Agitation. "I have won my name as the 'Rhymer of the Revolution,'" he said, "and am prouder of that distinction than I should be if I were made Poet Laureate of England." He did not seem to be aware that his fame as a poet could not last upon that foundation alone; or that there was anything in his poetry of which he might be more justly proud than of these political effusions. He was delighted when his correspondents styled him Ebenezer Elliott, C. L. R. (Corn Law Rhymer), and he had a seal with these initials surmounting his own name, which he was in the habit of using upon his letters. In conversation he was sometimes slow and deliberate; condensing his thoughts in as few words as possible, and giving the net result—as with a "whip of fire," without letting one see the "cold process" of his thinking.

Hence he was often sudden and startling in his annunciations ; but he was no dogmatist—in the rigid meaning of that word—and if his premises were disputed, would take infinite pains to establish them, conducting afterwards the entire argument with logical accuracy. But when the subject was a sacred one to him, and he grew warm over it, there was no bound to his rhetoric. He would utter the finest things, one after another, with the throat of Etna, scattering them about in blasts of fire and thunder. He was a sort of walking earthquake, clad in flowers and rainbows, one of the most beautiful and terrible of men.

I need not say that he was a thorough democrat in principle, for all his poems bear witness to the fact ; but he had no patience with Mobocracy, and despised the demagogues who made it their business to mislead the people, coolly pocketing the wages of their iniquity. At one period of his life, when William Lovett guided the popular movement for reform, Elliott did all in his power to promote the enfranchisement of the people, both by speaking and writing ; but when O'Connor and the physical force Chartists appeared, he withdrew from

the movement, and warned the working men of the inevitable issue of that business.

And whilst we were walking this afternoon in the garden at Hargate, he fought his old Reform Battles over again; and told me how he trembled when he had to face a public meeting; how he prepared all his speeches, and committed them to memory, *singing them* in public, to the same tune wherein he had learned them in private. And when we were tired of talking, he conducted me round the house and garden, and over his little farm of corn fields, grass, and clover. The garden, which was laid out by the poet himself, was very tastefully arranged, having many winding paths in it, running between rich borders of shrubs and flowers. A mound, artificially elevated, on one side of the garden, commanded a beautiful and extensive prospect of hills, woods, dales, and streams. On the west lay a sunny dell, and just beyond it, on the side of the hill, stood a farm-house and buildings — whilst several cows were grouped under the branches of a large beech tree in the farm croft. Lady Wood, West Wood, Spring Wood, and Lunn Wood, stretched away at our feet,

covering many hundred acres, and forming a fine foreground to the wide and distant scenery, lying between them and the Huddersfield Hill, which bounded the horizon. "We can see West Nab and Home Moss distinctly from this mound," said the poet, "and in damp weather they look as if they would come into my parlour windows." We proceeded from this mound down the hill side, which the poet had planted with trees and shrubs, to the little dell below, where a trout stream went babbling along over its shallow and stony bed. When we arrived opposite the corn-fields, just as they slope down to the lowlands—we being still in the dell—the poet led me to a tree, which spread its friendly branches over the beautiful waving grass at our feet. "Under this tree," he said, with a plaintive and serious voice,—“I mean to be buried. I shall sleep well enough here, out of the consecrated churchyard; and who knows but I may feel the daisies growing over my grave, and hear the birds sing to me in my winding-sheet!” He once desired to be buried at Shirecliffe, under the Gospel Tree, which he has celebrated in his poem of the “Ranter;” and had even driven a large nail in it, and com-

municated the fact to two beloved friends in Sheffield, that they might know it, and see his wishes enforced in case of his sudden death. But his sepulture on his own estate at Hargate was a more pleasing and touching desire, full of pastoral simplicity and patriarchal beauty. That it was his earnest desire to be thus buried, and that he had long contemplated the event, there can be no doubt. Writing to a friend, (Isaac Ironside, of Sheffield,) in September, 1848, he says: "I suffer great pain, and after losing more than twenty-eight pounds in weight, I continue to lose at the rate of one pound weekly. You cannot fatten calves in that way! If I am not removed suddenly, I shall last till April next." He then continues, "I wish to be buried in my skin at the foot of Lord Galway's ash tree here. My folks are all for holy ground and costs, so I suppose I must submit; and Rotherham Church being full of corruption, and one of our neighbouring clergymen happening to be here, I have been trying to bargain with him for a grave at Darfield. Could you think it! Sinking the offal, it will cost 40s. for the use of the ground alone." In this way he grimly played with the subject, but it had a deep

hold of him, nevertheless, as the little poem entitled "Let me rest :—"

"Where the wayside daisies grow,
Where the winds a-Maying go,"

will sufficiently testify. Neither did he look on death as trifling and unimportant, but as a serious event, upon which were suspended the awful reprisals of a future judgment and an eternal doom. He confessed, however, that he knew nothing of this great Hereafter, whose starry curtain all mortals are forbidden to undraw. But he clung with an infinite faith to the idea of immortality, and knew that he must soon unriddle the problem which it presents to us.

As we returned to the front of the house, he pointed to the wooded hills in the east, where Hickleton Hall, the seat of Sir Charles Wood (present Chancellor of the Exchequer) was situated ; with Conisbro' Castle in the distance, all of them visible in clear weather. We then crossed the garden, and went to the back of the house, where we had a fine view of Houghton Common—with its gorse and bracken—whilst lines of dark trees fenced it on the right, and thick towering woods on the left. Descending the hill side, which

was well planted with trees, we again entered the dell; and the poet led me to a fish pond which he had laid down himself, and stocked with trout from the neighbouring streams. It was a cool and beautiful spot, like some quiet nook in the mythic vale of Tempe. The birds sang there all day; and the pond itself was supplied by water which gushed in living streams out of the hill side. Elliott promised himself many happy hours in fishing and musing upon its banks. He had been a fisher in early life, and the statement of this fact, led naturally to Izaak Walton and his beautiful book on Angling, which contains, perhaps, the very best pastoral description in our language. I found that Elliott knew Walton by heart, and loved the fine old commonswealth-man, too, notwithstanding his loyalty to the king. All books, indeed, which were true reflexes of nature, were his delight. Hence the Howitts were his especial favourites, two of Nature's most beautiful children, whose lives were all sunshine and poetry. He spoke of their mutual wanderings, and visits to remarkable places, as a rare and pleasant feature in the married life of literary people; and so inseparable were they, he said, in his mind, that he

always associated with their names the old William and Mary shillings.*

When we returned to the house, we found Mrs. Elliott and her daughter waiting for us at the tea table. The little yellow canary was still singing, perched outside its cage; and the distant lowland landscape was beginning to darken in the blue twilight of evening, as we gazed upon it through the open casement. The room in which we were assembled was large and convenient, having the true household look about it, with none of the modern finery which marks the sitting rooms of the wealthy. There was the poet's library against the wall opposite the window,

* It is but right to add here, that Elliott's opinion of the Howitts underwent considerable modification, after the unhappy dispute between William Howitt, himself, and John Sanders, in the matter of the "People's Journal;" and he frequently expressed himself in no measured terms against what he called the "*unfair statements*" made by W. H. respecting the easy manner in which he (Elliott) had made his fortune. (See the "Visit to Elliott" in Howitt's "Homes and Haunts of the British Poets.") All that I can say here, from a personal knowledge of W. Howitt, is, that he is utterly incapable of falsehood or wilful misrepresentation, and must have misunderstood Elliott in the particular matter alluded to.

which, with his easy chair, and the wooden box wherein he kept his MSS., are now the most interesting of these household relics. The piano he did not look upon as a luxury, but as a necessary article, which ought to appertain to every home, even the poorest, and a deal box, instead of a mahogany case, to put the instrument in, would bring it, he said, within reach of the humblest means. Music was a great source of consolation to him, and often charmed him into forgetfulness of his bodily pain. For music has a language of her own, and speaks to us of things which, as Jean Paul says, "in all our endless life we have not found, and shall not find." The best parlour was opposite to the one we were sitting in, and contained portraits of the poet, his wife, and children. That of Elliott himself is the best I have yet seen, although it is far from being a true representation of the man. It is singular, that all the attempts made by various artists to paint him upon canvass, have been unsuccessful. William Howitt compliments Margaret Gillies upon the sketch she made of him, which appeared in the "People's Journal" during its palmy days, but it is a most comical failure, and reminds me of the

following criticism which the poet passed upon four portraits of him in oil, which appeared in the first exhibition on behalf of the Sheffield Mechanics' Institute. "Taking them altogether, I could imagine them to represent four important scenes in the life of a Tailor: first, the tailor turned gentleman; second, the tailor going a picturesqueing; third, the tailor seeking cabbage; fourth, the tailor selecting his own grave." As I said, however, the portrait possessed by his family is the best I have seen.

After tea we fell gradually into an earnest conversation upon the literature of the day. I have already spoken of his admiration of Byron, Keats, and other poets; and in alluding to the *Life of Keats*, by R. Monckton Milnes*—which he thought a fine piece of biography on the whole, although rather too hasty in its finish—he said the death of Keats, as described by his friend Severne, was the most painful and deeply-affecting scene upon record. And, indeed, the world is deeply indebted to this true and beautiful brother, who, with the love of St. John in

* Elliott thought very highly of R. M. Milnes, but said he was a lazy poet, and too rich to do justice to his faculties.

his great and devoted heart, watched the poor dying poet—day after day—week after week, and never left him until the stern work of death was over. “Had Keats lived,” said Elliott, “there is nothing which he might not have achieved in the way of poetry.” It was remarked that the poem called “St. Agnes Eve,” had no rival in our language as a picture of mediæval life; that its feudal and religious architecture was perfect, and that all the characters were as truly and faithfully drawn as those in the *Romeo and Juliet* of Shakspeare, of which, indeed, it was a kind of episode. “But the *Hyperion*, sir,” said Elliott, “what do you think of that?” That it is a beautiful ruin, created and deserted by the gods. “Aye,” he answered, “and what a ruin!” He then read the following lines upon Keats, which are published in the first volume of his “*More Prose and Verse, etc.*”

“He lived, and loved! He was a power
That left its thought more felt than spoken:
‘A fading flower, a falling shower,
A breaking wave’—which now is broken.

Can greatness die and be unborn?
It cannot thou in scorn repliest;

He perished in his scorn of scorn,
And lowest deemed, of all was highest.

A vapour quenched his visions grand ;
Ah ! hope destroyed is worth's undoing !
He left the deathless deed he planned,
A deed undone !—And what a Ruin !”

We then spoke of Scott and Tennyson, of Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb, Philip Bailey, and Charles Reece Pemberton. Scott was his greatest favourite, and he quoted long passages from “ Marmion ” and the “ Lady of the Lake.” “ I envy Scott his narrative power in poetry,” he said, “ more than any other faculty he possesses. Nothing is more difficult than to tell a tale well in rhyme ; and Scott has succeeded better than any one else. I have begun,” he continued, “ a narrative epic in twelve books, four of which are finished ; and each book is complete in itself. I will read it to you before you go, and you will then see, in my own failure, why I envy Scott.” * I afterwards heard the poem in

* Elliott was fond of depreciating his own powers, and I believe there was a good deal of egotism in the practice. He knew very well what he could do, and what his poetry was worth. He was, when he chose to be so, an excellent and judicious critic, both of his own performances and those of others.

question, which is printed in his new volumes; and I cannot understand why it has dropped silently from the press; for it is a poem of great power and beauty, and contains passages superior to anything which Elliott had previously written. There is a little incongruity and indistinctness perhaps in some of the characters, but this is amply atoned for by the general skill of the narrative, and the harmony of its plan and details. There are one or two blots in it, however, of which he was duly warned by friendly critics; and these consist in that love of the horrible, which, he says in his autobiography, haunted him so in his young days. I allude more particularly to the picture of the drowned woman who fell a victim to Lord Konig's lust—which occurs in the sixteenth section of the second book of this poem*—and which, in spite of the moral and poetical drapery thrown over it by the poet, is a loathsome and not a "*beauteous horror*." This was pointed out to him when he read it, and it was endeavoured to be shown that things horrible and repulsive in themselves were not fit subjects for poetry, and could

* "*Etheline*," an epic in four books, each book complete in itself; printed in "*More Prose and Verse*, etc."

not be elevated, even by the highest genius, into the region of human sympathy. He acknowledged the justice of this criticism, and promised to alter the passage, and I have no doubt would have done so, if death had not summoned him away so soon after this conversation.

Elliott loved Tennyson for his pathos, and the courtly finish of his marvellous verse. He has caught a few echoes of the Marianne in a soliloquy which occurs in the opening of "Etheline;" but Tennyson was too dreamy a poet to make much impression on the Corn Law Rhymer, although he spoke of him with affection and reverence. Bailey's "Festus" had a stronger hold of him; but he knew very well how to discriminate between a panorama of pictures and a poetic work of art. His admiration of "Festus" was, therefore, limited to its glorious passages and wild flights of imagination, and to the lyrics scattered through its pages. He severely condemned the theological soliloquies which darken the last edition of this poem, and so painfully burden its action. "The book," he said, "wanted cutting down before in the first edition, and now it sprawls its unwieldy length to such an appalling extent,

that its many and manifest beauties will hardly save it from perishing."

He spoke with great enthusiasm of Carlyle, and had a copy of "The French Revolution, a History," in his library. He was a long while before he knew what to make of that book; but when he had grown familiar with its strange terminology, and could steer his way amid the endless pageants that swept in glaring colours past him upon that wild revolutionary ocean of blood and fire, he found it the most vivid and splendid of histories. He called it poetry in prose, and named Carlyle the Homer of his age. And then as he warmed in his eulogies, he rose from his seat, and advancing to the bookcase took down the first volume—the Bastille—and said, "Now, sir, I will give you a scene from this book that would wring tears from marble." He then read, with a voice full of pathos, the following letter, signed Queret Demery, which was found in one of the cells of the Bastille, after its demolition by the populace:—

"If, for my consolation, Monseigneur would grant me, for the sake of God, and the most Blessed Trinity, that I could have news of my dear wife, *were it only her name*

on a card, to show that she is alive ! it were the greatest consolation I could receive, and I should for ever bless the greatness of Monseigneur."

"There, sir," he said, wiping away the tears which streamed down his furrowed cheeks, "that is the most painful and agonizing passage in the language. You see it has made a woman of me; and I should be a brute if I could not weep over such great, sad sufferings, such calm resignation in the midst of I know not how many years of despair, which only breaks silence at last in a touching, heart-breaking appeal to this d——d Monseigneur, that it would please him to send the poor captive tidings of his dear wife, were it only 'her name on a card.' O God," he continued, "how dreadfully the wail of that poor, unknown, broken heart sounds in the ears of men for ever. Bless the greatness of Monseigneur!" he added, walking fiercely up and down the room, "yes! and pray, too, that hell might be hot enough for him! God forgive these scoundrels, sir, it is not in me!"

Later in the evening he asked me if I had seen Emerson during his visit to this country, and when I replied that I had the honour to

entertain him during the greater part of his stay in Huddersfield, he requested me to describe the man, and his bearing in social life. My great reverence for Emerson made me draw, perhaps, too partial a picture of him; for the poet remarked, that such a high and impassable nature, with such simple and winning manners, rarely met together in so illustrious a person, and that he approached the ideal he had formed of the great Plato. He had not read Emerson, however, and was only acquainted with him through extracts from his printed works, which he had seen in the periodicals of the day, and through the public reports of his lectures. If he had known more of him, he would have liked him less; for the so called Transcendental Philosophy was to him a stumbling-block. He was too strongly tied with his natal-cord to the objective world to appreciate the speculations and inner revealings of the Massachusetts Philosopher; although his mind was broad enough in its æsthetic and intellectual relations, and could grasp all the beauty of the universe, and resolve—in some fashion at least—not a few of the moral problems which affect the destiny of the race. But beauty was not symbolical to him; or at

least, not in the same sense as it was to Shakspeare, Plotinus, or Swedenborg. It was God's silent gospel, revealing God as *the Beautiful*; and beauty was his divinest Idea. He did not see that beauty was fleeting and evanescent, the mere garment of the Invisible, behind which HE sat enthroned, whose are all the worlds. And because he could not pierce through the painted robes of the Phenominal, he never read the Divine Secrets, and could form, therefore, no conception of the "Ubi," or "Whereness," of Emerson. Still there was enough of the practical and homely in this author to recommend itself to the poet; and as the newspapers, which always cater for the mass, instinctively assimilated such passages, as they were thrown off by the reviewers, Elliott's estimate of Emerson was formed almost exclusively upon them. He much regretted that neither Carlyle nor Emerson had visited him, especially since they had both been in his neighbourhood. He was informed that Carlyle had once set off with Monekton Milnes to visit him, but was detained on the way by some occurrence which had slipped the memory of the speaker; and moreover, that Carlyle had asked many questions about him

upon one or two occasions which were specified; and Elliott in his turn now asked for particulars respecting Carlyle. The conversation terminated by the poet expressing his deep regret that the opportunity alluded to was gone by for ever. For now, he said, we shall never meet, unless in heaven.

I have previously given the general characteristics of Elliott's conversational speech, but I find it impossible to do him justice in this respect. The poor fragments which I have rendered in these pages will give no idea of him, except to those who knew him personally (for they can vivify these broken sentences, by putting the fire of the *man* into them); to all others they must be comparatively lifeless. And this seems to be the fittest place to describe Elliott's personal appearance, not as he was when a young man, but at the time I am now speaking of. Most of his readers imagine him to have been a man of large proportions, a true son of the forge—broad-set, strong, and muscular as a Cyclop. But he was the reverse of all this. In stature he was not more than five feet six inches, of a slender make, and a bilious-nervous temperament. His hair was quite grey; and his eyes, which were of

a greyish blue, were surmounted by thick bushy brows, which looked like the thunder clouds of Jove. His forehead was not broad, but rather narrow; and his head was small. There was great pugnacity in the mouth, especially when he was excited, but in repose it seemed to smile, more in consciousness of strength, however, than in sunny unconscious beauty. His nostrils were full of scorn; and his eyes—which were the true indices of his soul—literally smote you with fire, or beamed with kindness and affection, according to the mood he was in. In earnest debate, his whole face was lighted up, and became terrible and tragic. At such times he paced up and down the room with a firm foot, full of trampling scorn, and his words were whirlwinds. In gayer moments he would attempt comedy, and I have heard him recite passages from *Molliere*—who was a great favourite with him—until I scarcely knew whether to laugh or weep. For he had no comic faculty, and all his attempts that way were mere travestied tragedy. His voice was as musical as a lute, and capable of the deepest pathos. He was very fond of that fine old song by Burns, “Ye banks and braes o’ bonny Doon,” and during the evening I am now speaking

of, he recited and sang it with great effect, notwithstanding his weakness. Fancy the grey old man, standing, during this performance, behind his easy chair, dressed in a blue frock-coat, a blue waistcoat, which came down to the hips, and a pair of blue trousers, for this was his ordinary attire, and he walked about his garden with a blue cap on. These facts are, to me at least, very interesting; and I think they are not without general interest.

He had a great love for the Latin and Greek classics, which he read through English translations. Homer, Hesiod, Sophocles, and Tacitus, were his chief favourites. He was well acquainted with “Æschylus,” was keenly alive to its beauties, and was fond of comparing the different translations of this tragedy; never failing to adopt the best renderings of particular lines. In a book called a “Monopolygraph,” by Samuel Gower, a scholar and poet of Holmfirth, near Huddersfield, he found the following beautiful translation of one of the most difficult lines in this tragedy, which he was never weary of repeating. I will quote the passage; and it is the last line to which I now allude:—

PROMETHEUS (*solus.*)

“ Oh, thou divine and boundless atmosphere !
And you, ye swift-winged winds of heaven ; and thou
Oh countless laughter of the salt-sea waves ! ”

There can be no question that this is a great improvement upon the old translations—and that it is rendered in the true spirit of the original.

I said that Elliott's prejudices were very strong, and will now relate an anecdote to illustrate this fact, although, indeed, such illustration is scarcely necessary. We had been speaking about mesmerism : and Mrs. Elliott, who had seen many experiments performed by Dr. Holland* of Sheffield, confessed her entire belief in this mysterious and occult science. The poet, however, was loud in his denunciations of it, and insisted that it was mere collusion and quackery. As this was a charge brought against many men whom I knew to have practised mesmerism, and whose characters were unimpeachable, I ventured to remonstrate with him, intimating at the same time that I had

* G. C. Holland, Esq., M.D., of Sheffield, was an old and intimate friend of Elliott's—a poet, a scholar, and a man of considerable eminence in his profession.

proved the truth of mesmerism myself, in various cases, and at various times. "If that be the case," said Elliott, "you can mesmerize me. Come, sir, try your power; and if you succeed I will believe in this infernal art." I was unwilling, however, to make the attempt, because I do not like playing at such a serious game; but I told him I had no doubt I should succeed, in case I tried. He called this a subterfuge, and laughed at me with the merriest mockery; literally crowing with exultation, and repeating his challenge, as he paced up and down the room. At the request of his daughter and Mrs. Elliott, who were very anxious that he should be convinced, I at last accepted the challenge. Accordingly, the poet sat down in his chair, and the moment my hand came in contact with his head, he shrunk as if struck by a Voltaic Pile, uttered a deep sigh, fell back upon his chair, and all consciousness fled from him. I shall never forget my sensations at that moment, as I contemplated the pale and lifeless form of the poet—thus suddenly silenced—all the fire of his spirit quenched, and put out as if by the hand of Death. His daughter, however, became alarmed, and to relieve her I began to

demesmerize him. He gradually roused himself, and when consciousness returned, he rubbed his eyes, started from his chair, and exclaimed, "What, have I been asleep?" "Yes," was the triumphant reply of his daughter; and Mrs. Elliott clapped her hands in chorus. The poet, however, was still dubious; and would have it that he had fallen asleep from exhaustion.

In religious matters it is difficult to say what he believed, and what he disbelieved. Like the great mass of literary men, he had no creed, properly so called, and no faith in sects or parties. Still he loved Christianity for the human beauty which pervades it, and the divine revelations which it unfolds to man. In one of his letters to a friend, already quoted, he says, "I am a Christian from conviction, and because I cannot help it." The same friend to whom this letter was written confesses himself much indebted to Elliott for removing his religious doubts, although the method adopted by the poet was strange, and quite alien to orthodox teaching. "For instance," says the party alluded to, "on my expressing a conjecture, or a hope, or a belief, of which he saw the absurdity, he would, by a single striking

sentence, send a flash of conviction to my mind, which suddenly demolished my airy castles. He well knew that wholesale doubt led to enquiry, and enquiry to consistent and lasting faith. He seldom meddled with theological views, and thought religion more a passion than a belief. The character, real works and doctrine of Christ, he maintained were only to be accounted for on the grounds of God's presence and power in Christ. Lastly, he had a strong faith in the immortality of the soul." Such is the account furnished me by this Sheffield friend; but it must be remembered that this is a reminiscence of years long since passed away; and I have no means of knowing what were Elliott's latest convictions on these important subjects. I will quote, however, a passage from one of his letters to me, dated September 11th, 1848, in which, speaking upon the availableness of prayer, he says: "Long, long ago, perhaps fifteen years, when food-taxing and much-mortgaged Chandos—who grieved to see anything eatable escape his maw—had been accusing his victims of luxurious living, and want of forethought, I prayed aloud, in the presence of eight or ten thousand Sheffields, in

Paradise Square assembled, ‘that he might live to know what it is to be poor.’ Though a murmured, yet sublime, ‘Amen!’ responded to me, persons present, and afterwards persons not present, called me ‘*monster*,’ with the saving clause, ‘*if not madman*.’ But God heard my prayer. I then ought not to say that supplications addressed immediately to Him are useless. The following, however, is my creed: The only true, because the only useful prayer, is that which human beings (after vainly doing their best for themselves) address to their fellow-creatures for assistance. *And it justifies begging!* Unless desperate people are to be forced to that awful and sole remaining alternative, which they have just the same right to use that a drowning man has to catch at a straw.”

The best summary, however, of his religious convictions is contained in the following poem:—

RELIGION.

“WHAT is religion? speak the truth in love,
Reject no good: mend, if thou canst, thy lot.
Doubting, enquire,—nor dictate till thou prove.
Enjoy thy own—exceed not, trespass not.

Pity the scorers of life's meanest thing.
If wronged, forgive—that hate may lose his sting.
Think, speak, work, get ; bestow, or wisely keep.
So live, that thou may'st smile and no one weep.
Be blessed—like birds that sing because they love.
And bless—like rivers singing to the sun,
Giving and taking blessings, as they run ;
Or soft voiced showers, that cool the answering grove
When cloudy wings are seen in heaven displayed,
And blessings brighten o'er the freshened sod
Till earth is like the countenance of God.
This is Religion ! saith the Bard of Trade."

In the year 1848, I proposed to deliver a lecture upon his writings, and he furnished me with the following particulars, which, added to the sketch I have already drawn of his person and manners, will complete the picture.

" You may say," he begins, " that there is nothing remarkable in Elliott's personal appearance, except, perhaps, his gentle manners. He has neither a shoulder like a leg of mutton, nor a hinder-end broader than a blacksmith's bellows. He is five feet seven inches high, and slimly rather than strongly made. His eyes are dim and pale ; mostly kind in their expression, but sometimes wild. His features are harsh, but expressive, and not unpleasing. On the whole, he is just

the man who, if unknown, would pass unnoticed anywhere."

This letter was written October 5th, 1848, and on the 7th of the same month, I received the following:—

"What you have to say of me will not be complete without this addition, which you can use, or not: He is a politician and a poet. With his politics, you know, I have here nothing to do. Poets, you also know, are usually people who, having expressed in verse, thoughts not fit or not good enough for prose, get pensioned or die in the workhouse. It is a real distinction to the Corn Law Rhymer, that in his grey hairs, and in the land of palaces and workhouses, he is not yet either a pauper or a pensioner. Tired, and comparatively poor, but self-sustained, like one who, after hard labour, reaches his home and rests, he sits on his own hill top."

The first notice of serious illness we find in his letters is dated May, 1838. "I have been lately troubled," says he, writing to Mr. Tait, "with a disease which the doctors tell *me* is not dangerous, although it may become so, unless I remove some of the causes of it. It is a spasmodic affection of

the nerves, caused or exasperated by over-excitement of any kind, and particularly public speaking. Even lecturing, I am told, is injurious. I must, then, lecture no more." *

" 21st December, 1839. — I am warned that I cannot speak at public meetings without great danger of sudden death. You are not aware, perhaps, that I have been for two years or more liable, after excitement of any kind, to dreadful breathlessness—a sensation of being hanged without a rope—resulting, I suppose, from a change at *head-quarters*. I have been better, however, since the great Chartist meeting here. When the hustings fell, something gave way in my left side, or rather towards it, as if two fingers had been thrust down it inside."

* When Mr. Elliott became well known, he lectured occasionally on poetry and other subjects. The following is his frank estimate of his own powers as a lecturer:—
"You ask if I am eloquent? Yes, when I have got the steam up. But I cannot manage details well, and consequently am not fit to lecture on the corn laws. I have more thoughts than words; but I can condense long arguments into short phrases, and give, like a blow from a whip of fire, the result of thinking without the cold process."

“Great Houghton, near Barnsley.—If you print this article, I will accept nothing for it. It is quite unworthy of the subject, and yet I have done my best. My mind is gone.”

This continued to torment him at intervals for six years, when a more serious complaint took its place.

“Argilt Hill, near Barnsley, 9th May, 1849.—Four years ago I had got rid of the breathlessness which often frightened me at Sheffield, and I thought I never was stronger; but I have since been two and a half years ill of a bowel complaint, suffering intense pain by day and night, except when dozed with laudanum. About a month ago the disease was discovered to be that of which Talma died—stricture of the great gut, threatening enclosure. For some days I have been rather better; and if I recover, I shall certainly bestow my tediousness upon you in an Highland tour.”

“19th September.—I have been for some months *very, very* ill.”

Here these letters stop suddenly; and in little more than two months—that is, on the 1st of December, 1849, the struggles of their writer, first with ignorance, then with fortune, then with bread-tax, then with disease,

touched and elevated throughout by gleams of poetry, and of pure, gentle, and beautiful feeling, terminated in death.*

In conclusion, I will quote what the poet's son writes me respecting his father's last illness : " He was troubled with acute internal pain of a fixed character. It was cancer of the rectum. By means of the strongest stimulants and opiates, his life was prolonged until the close of 1849. Then his sufferings rapidly increased. The last month of his life was one of great torture, and equal fortitude; and he died in the presence of his family early on the morning of the first of December, and was buried, in great privacy, as he wished to be, in the churchyard of the beautiful little village of Darfield. The tower of the church can be seen from the windows of his house, and forms a distinguishing feature in a landscape that was dear to his eyes.

"What can I say more? Shall I tell you how beautifully, how poetically he watched the approach of death? 'Francis,' he often said to me, 'I am to die; and if I am to live in pain, I do not ask to live. I could have

* The above passage, including the extracts from Elliott's letters, is quoted from a tract on the poet, published by the Messrs. Chambers, of Edinburgh.

wished to finish Eth-Kon-Tel (this was the name he had intended to give to a narrative poem, consisting of three narrative poems, each a part of the same story, and yet a complete story in itself, 'Etheline' being the first of them); I die with my work undone—with my faculties undeveloped. I cannot help mourning over Eth-Kon-Tel.' He hastened the contemplated marriage of his daughter Fanny—his *beloved* daughter—whose name was her mother's, and desired to be buried in the church where she was married. On the wedding day he was supported from the bed to the window, to see the return of the party from church. The fatigue was almost more than he was capable of bearing. 'My child,' he said to Fanny, 'I feel so weak that an infant could fell me with a primrose.' He heard a robin singing one morning in the garden beneath his chamber window, and composed the lines I send you below, dictating them to me as he lay upon his pillow. They are his last notes :—

“ ‘ Thy notes, sweet Robin, soft as dew,
Heard soon or late, are dear to me ;
To music I could bid adieu,
But not to thee.

When from my eyes this life's throng
Has passed away, no more to be ;
Then Autumn's primrose, Robin's song,
Return to me.' "

And thus in strains of gentle music did the spirit of our brave poet pass away for ever from the earth. Those who knew him best, loved him most ; and will feel for some time yet to come as if, in his death, "some great wrong" had been done to them. Time, however, will bring with it its own wisdom, and convert this private and apparent wrong into universal justice, which all shall see and acknowledge. In the meanwhile, let us be thankful for the rich legacy which the poet has left us in his songs, and for the example which he has set us of a life lived for a purpose.

APPENDIX

TO THE

LIFE, CHARACTER, AND GENIUS

OF

EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

APPENDIX.

MR. THOMAS LISTER, the Barnsley Poet, has sent me the letter and extracts which I print below ; and I am glad of an opportunity so favourable as the present to say a word or two respecting this excellent man, whom Elliott delighted to call his friend, and for whom I also have great respect and esteem. Mr. Lister was on terms of intimacy with the Corn Law Rhymer for upwards of fifteen years. During the last eight or nine years Mr. Lister was a frequent guest at Elliott's house ; for Barnsley and Hargate Hill are not more than seven or eight miles apart. It was my good fortune to visit Elliott—when I was first introduced to him—with Mr. Lister, and I recollect with

pleasure the beautiful drive we had through that richly-wooded country, and the many objects of interest which Lister pointed out to me on the way. When we arrived at Hargate Hill I was surprised to find Elliott a man of short stature, instead of the bulky Titan I had pictured him in imagination. The sound of our gig wheels in the courtyard brought him to the door. He was dressed in a complete suit of blue, and wore a blue cap, as I have described him in the third part of this memoir. He welcomed us with real hospitality, and as his serving-man was away from the house, he fell to, with great dexterity, and began to unbuckle our harness himself. His wife and daughter received us in the hall, and ushered us into the sitting-room, where we spent a happy and memorable evening. I had been invited to spend a few days with the poet, and after Mr. Lister was gone, Elliott and I made a night of it.

And now let me give a short sketch of Lister's life, in the words of a friendly and competent critic :—

“Our rustic Bard was lured by the charms of Nature, which luxuriate in his native valley, and by the trains of contemplation

to which existing events prompted him, to indulge in the sweet seducements of Poesy, before he had acquired almost any acquaintance with the proudest and least perishable of her songs. Possessing but a slight knowledge of the rules of composition, and still less of the laws which regulate the standard of taste—he has composed, chiefly whilst pursuing his daily toils in the open air, many productions which have found favour amongst those who know him, and have excited a warm interest throughout the country.

“Some time after his ‘warblings wild’ had attracted the notice of his townsmen, and particularly of James Porter, Esq., of Park House, his warmest advocate and weightiest supporter, a vacancy occurred in the office of post-master, at Barnsley, his native town. The appointment of a successor rested with Lord Morpeth. His lordship, remembering the Yorkshire bard who had been introduced to him during the election for Yorkshire, generously nominated him to the office, and was seconded in his choice by the principal inhabitants of the town. But an insuperable obstacle prevented the fulfilment of his wishes—an oath was then, by law, required, previous to an instalment in a government office.

Though the contrast between the management of a horse and cart (which was then Lister's occupation) and that of a profitable situation, was greatly in favour of the latter, yet Lister could only fill this post by sacrificing his principle. He had been trained up under the eye of honest and revered parents in the principles of the Society of Friends, and hence his objection to taking an oath."

I may add, that a very interesting correspondence took place between the young poet and Lord Morpeth upon this subject of the oath, which ended in mutual regrets on the part of the writers; for as Lister could not violate his conscience by taking the required oath, neither could the noble and generous lord suspend the existing law in the objector's favour. Lister, therefore, lost the situation and kept his conscience, like a brave and truthful man.

A subsequent alteration in the law enabled him, however, when the office became again vacant, to accept the appointment, which he still retains. The "warblings wild" alluded to in the previous extracts, were published in a volume called "The Rustic Wreath," and had a sale of upwards of 3,000 copies. Some of the poems are beautiful; and they

are all far above mediocrity. In character they are simple and descriptive, sometimes pathetic and humorous. The "Yorkshire Hirings" is full of fun, and hits off the provincial dialect in admirable style. Since his duties commenced as post-master, Mr. L. has written no more poems. He has devoted himself, however, to science and scientific pursuits, and is a good botanist, ornithologist, and geologist. If he would write a description of his own neighbourhood, after the manner of "White's Natural History of Selbourne," (for which he is well qualified,) he would produce a book that would add considerably to his reputation, and give pleasure and instruction to all.

THOMAS LISTER TO JANUARY SEARLE.

"Post Office, Barnsley, 4th mo. 21st, 1850.

"DEAR FRIEND,

"I was at Leeds yesterday, and was reminded (from certain matters which then transpired) of thy request to furnish a few particulars of the literary life of our lamented friend, Ebenezer Elliott. Although,

at the time, I had no intention of undertaking this duty, to any extent, partly from a cause which operates in both of us, though diversely—that is, a dread of taking up the pen for lengthy communications—and partly, because the experiences I had known of Elliott's literary life were too much connected with myself to be generally interesting, or even desirable to be made public; yet, notwithstanding these objections, I had previously formed a resolve to collect, from my manifold reminiscences of the last fifteen years, a few choice souvenirs of my wanderings, conversations, and correspondence with Elliott. That task has proceeded no farther than the opening step; and I cannot answer for my morbid indolence—so far as writing is concerned—when I shall be able to bring it to a conclusion. I have seen nothing yet to satisfy me, either in delineations of the life and character, or criticisms on the writings, recently ushered into the world, of this extraordinary man; nor is it in my power to supply the desideratum. His 'More Prose and Verse' was reviewed by *The Examiner*; many of the poetic excellencies contained therein were ably pointed out; but I differ greatly with them in their under estimate of his capability for prose composition; witness the beauty and strength combined in his Lectures on the English Poets, three of which now appear in the second volume, just issued. This volume, *The Spectator* of yesterday reviews. I think the editor's discriminating notice of the merits and demerits of the poetry therein is just—even the severer portions thereof, which condemn the unreflecting manner in which everything, good, bad, or indifferent, that has proceeded from Elliott's pen for the last few years,—gleanings from 'Tait,' the Sheffield Papers, and innumerable periodicals—have been issued in these posthumous volumes. The critic supposes

the blame to rest with the over anxiety of survivors; it was not so. Elliott's own deliberate will has resolved, and his own uncontrolled act has accomplished, their publication; every line was sent to the publisher before his death; and it was only the last few proofs that his energy—scarce vanquished by the gripe of Death—failed to overlook. Even that coarseness, and virulence towards the landed gentry, manifested in his style, when those vexatious questions were touched, was adopted by him on principle. When I have contended the point with him, as to marring the beauty of a fine passage, or a whole poem, by some violent or unpoetic expression, he always had a reason to offer for such violation of the poetic proprieties. Take the following as an example of what I mean; the passage occurs at the close of 'The Splendid Village:'—

“Path of the quiet fields, which oft, of yore,
Led me at morn o'er Sheustone's page to pore;

* * * *

Sweet, dewy, sunny, flowery footpath, thou
Art gone for ever like the poor man's cow.
No more the pious youth, with book in hand,
Spelling the words he fain would understand,
Shall bless thy mazes, while the evening bell
Sounds o'er the valley, softened, up the dell.
But, from the window of the loyal inn,
The great unpaid, who cannot err or sin,
Well pleased, shall see the pomp of LAWYER RIDGE,
And poor SQUIRE GRUB's *starv'd maids and dandy bridge*,
etc., etc.

“Again, in that noble delineation of mountain grandeur and desolate sterility—the scenery of which is

embodied in that picture of him which hangs in the parlour at Hargate Hill:—

“I thank ye, billows of a granite sea,
That the bribed plough, defeated, halts below;
And thanks, majestic barrenness! to thee,
For one grim region, in a land of woe,
Where tax-sown wheat, and paupers will not grow.’

“To my objections as to having so rich a draught of pleasure so rudely dashed from my lips, he would reply, ‘I always endeavour to use words which express my meaning. I wish to stir up indignation against Lawyer Ridge and Squire Grub.’ Again, in the other passage, I name the ‘*bribed plough*,’ because it is so in effect; and ‘*tax-sown wheat*’ because the land is ‘*sown in taxes*.’

“To this I should acquiesce in silence; I could not gainsay the logic, whatever I might advance as to the poetry. But I by no means admit the supposition of *The Spectator*, that the cause of this coarse violence has been the narrowness of his education; not intended by *The Spectator* to be considered as such, perhaps, as to *book-learning*, but with respect to a certain low provincial range of association and acquaintance, and a desire—manifest enough, *The Spectator* thinks, in his writings—to become the *head of the company*. To speak from what I know, I have almost always had the pleasure to meet him, when in company with minds of a superior stamp to the ordinary run of society. For instance—I met him first with Pemberton; after one of the spirited delineations of Shakspeare, given by the latter, in a manner that I have never seen excelled; (and Pemberton was able to give two hours’ talk after that effort) on which

occasion Elliott as well as myself were the interested listeners of the company. On another occasion I have met him, with the same party and others, at the house of Thomas Asline Ward, Esq., of Sheffield—to whom, as *The Man of the People*, one of Elliott's poems is dedicated. I have met him also often with Mr. Stannus, an eloquent minister of the Unitarian persuasion; with John Fowler, Hon. Secretary of the Sheffield Institute, and editor of the 'Remains of C. R. Pemberton;' with Spencer T. Hall; etc., etc.

"Then there are the interviews and communications of our humble selves, with this inestimable bard; and, spite of *The Spectator*, we will not class ourselves either with the narrow or vulgar. In addition to all these, there are numerous distinguished men that Elliott, at home and abroad, has met and communicated with; amongst others, Southey, to whom he gives the credit of having 'taught him the art of Poetry;' and Dr. Bowring, both of whom had a main hand in making his talents more widely known. Also Colonel Thompson and O'Connell, at great meetings, both in Manchester and London. Adams, (Junius Rendivivus,) who often visited him at Sheffield and Hargate Hill; Montgomery and G. C. Holland, fellow-townsmen and co-labourers in the wide, pleasant fields of poesy: enough, amply so, to prove the superior class of his companionship. Then as to his '*seeking to be the head of the company*,' the contrary was the case. Though he was civil and amiable to all, gentle and simple, that came across him, or with whom he came in contact, he rather shunned than sought company or public notice. To any conversation of interest he was always a willing listener, and never assumed to be the Oracle of the circle. On Corn Law and monied subjects we grant he was allowed to

discourse, *ad libitum*. In all my intercourse with him, I never observed in him an ungenerous action, nor heard—except of factions—an unkind word. My first interview, detailed in an accompanying extract, was followed by many others before he left Sheffield. I accompanied him to one or two sites in that neighbourhood, but he did not fix on one eligible as a residence. About ten years ago he bought, at great advantage, a plot of ten acres at Hargate Hill, on Houghton Common. He has since told me that more than the purchase money was soon made of the bark and a portion of the wood. I walked over with him to view the spot, through the vale of the Dearne, whose sylvan pastoral scenes delighted him greatly. There was nothing on the estate but a small cottage, which now forms the kitchen of the poet's house. At a second visit with him, J. Fowler, and other Sheffield friends, something in the way of planning the building and grounds was accomplished. The neighbouring farmers laughed at the idea of a comfortable spot and productive grounds being made on a mere 'fox cover,' and prophesied him a succession of plentiful crops of whins and brackens. Even his Sheffield friends augured great discomfort, almost approaching to starvation, in the probability that he would have everything to fetch from Barnsley; and Fowler humorously remarked that he had better affix a board at the end of his house, inscribed, '*Ebenezer Elliott, Poet and Common Carrier.*' What the result of his patient toils and well-executed plans prove, I need not say—it is a most delightful home for a retired poet,* and up to the last few weeks before his death, he

* Since Elliott's death the estate has been sold, and I am glad to say *re-purchased*, though at some disadvantage. I hope it will never go again out of the family.

busied himself with projects to make the grounds still more pleasant and picturesque.

“I have made it a point to visit him at least once every season; and many and delightful are the rambles we have taken in that richly-diversified locality, to which Howitt, with all his descriptive powers, has done nothing like justice in his unsatisfactory account of a visit to Elliott’s abode.

“New Park Spring conjoined to Lady Cross Wood; the bold stretch of billowy woodland which his residence commands; with the Dearne Valley and wooded slopes beyond, on the Barnsley side, were frequently explored by us. The Lady Cross was pointed out by him amid these woods separating two domains. Then, in the opposite direction, was the delightful walk over the common, blossoming with gorse and broom, to Howell Wood—a walk thou wilt remember well, being taken on our memorable first visit.

“At another time we should diverge by Howell Spring, a small fountained glen, abounding with the freshest and purest water, by Clayton-in-the-Clay—through Hooton Pagnell Park to Watchley Crag, returning by Frickley Hall. Another rich and commanding scene was found in prolonging the route, over Houghton Common to Kirby Common, examining the sole remaining oak of the colossal couple, ‘Adam and Eve,’ one of which sheltered Nevison during his sojourn at Ringstone Hill. Then descending the elevated slopes, by Brierley Manor, we took the field path to Grimethorpe, and returned through Lady Cross Wood. In these rambles, Elliott’s intense love for all natural objects was continually manifested, and his marvellous power of depicting them vividly. Though presuming on no scientific skill, he had considerable knowledge of trees, flowers, and birds, by their

common names, and was always glad to increase his stock of information from those who had gone more minutely into the various walks of natural history and science. To me the most interesting journey we took was in his small pony-gig through Thurnscoe, Bolton-on-Dearne, to Conisborough Castle. The spacious valley of the Don, (a rich alluvial bed lying between the magnesian limestone beds on the one hand, stretching in a bold continuous ridge from Hickleton Park to Sprotborough, and the first swell of the coal measures on the side of Conisborough and Dennaby)—the neat village of Conisborough, where we dined, the frowning keep of the old Saxon Castle towering above town and river—and above all, the locality itself, stamped with the ineffaceable triumphs of Scott's genius, in his incomparable 'Ivanhoe,' made a permanent impression on Elliott's mind, though his years did not permit him to mount the keep with me, and enjoy the commanding scene from that elevation. Our return by the flourishing village of Wath-upon-Dearne, and Darfield, was an agreeable variation of our route. In one of the treasured scraps received from him, he says:—'If I live till summer, I could like to revisit Conisborough with you. A result of our visit is a long poem, which I think my best. Edlington Wood, I am told, is worth a visit.' The poem alluded to is 'Etheline.' A loose remark of mine about the Don Valley appearing like the bed of an ancient lake, he told me, originated the conception of the poem. None of the newspaper critics, not even the local ones, admit any merit in this poem. I know none, with the fatal facility of the octosyllabic measure, of more sustained strength and beauty. On my last visit he spoke of his probable Biography, for which he has collected much matter. He had heard of the life of poor Keats, by R. M. Milnes—

fortunately, I had secured the work, and sent it—and the mode of allowing Keats's correspondence and writings to tell the tale of his life, met his approbation.

“T. LISTER.”

I subjoin the following extract from Mr. Lister's note-book, for the year 1836:—

“I was first introduced to Elliott by Charles Pemberton, the graceful elocutionist, the fiery-souled patriot. Since that time, months elapsed without my seeing Elliott again. However, I took the privilege of kindred feeling, though low in its stamp, and made bold to visit him in his own abode. Our presuppositions of a person's character, from his works, are often fallacious; one would hardly expect, from the bold and fiery spirit stamped on his writings, to meet a man of mild speech and urbane manners. But when his heart glows with his subject, especially in recitation, whether of his own impassioned lines, or the strains of some of those worthies whom he worships as stars of song, his features kindle into energy, his eyes, otherwise somewhat sunken and grey, glisten with rapture, and his voice assumes a rich and tuneful accent, characterizing expressly the subject on which his powers are awakened. One of his themes was ‘Ribbleden,’ or ‘The Christening;’—Ribbleden being a small mountain stream, near Sheffield, tumbling down a darkly-shaded ravine, and falling into the Rivilin, after a short but beautiful and romantic course; and he read the poem with great effect. I have seen Ribbleden, and other scenes celebrated in his poems, with the poet himself, and shall never forget it. His conversation on these occasions was fully equal to his best compositions. It was, in fact, a second edition of his poetry. His language does not

flow either in swift or copious streams, but always with precision and force, conveying solid enlightened sentiments, strongly condensed, yet full and well defined, so that at this distance of time I can give a slight delineation of them.

“Walking up Shirecliffe Wood, where in a few moments, from the full glare of the town, we found ourselves as much shut out from the world as in the heart of the New Forest, these remarks fell from him:— ‘No one could have dreamed of a seclusion like this within bow-shot of the town. What a treat to the inhabitants, did they but know it! This scene is worth thousands of pounds to Sheffield. Money can be no equivalent for pure pleasures like these. You surely would not part with your present tastes and feelings for a mine of wealth. I shall never forget the last time I came here with Charles R. Pemberton—that tree which overlooks the summit he climbed with as much agility as if the act were as familiar to him as walking is to us. He clasped the stem with his sinewy limbs, set his toil-strung muscles in motion, and went up like a man of wire. How the view delighted him! I, too, have my predilections for the spot. It is the scene of my “Ranter.” From that tree I made my observations of the bold striking scene around. I am attached to the place from the associated idea. I know not that the “Ranter” is my best poem, but it is the first that brought me into notice, and I am grateful to it on that account.’ At another time the conversation turned on books most worthy to be read. ‘Have you seen aught of Joanna Baillie’s?’ (No! I had no notion of her merits as a writer.) ‘Oh! sir, you should read “De Montford;” it only wants a little to equal Shakspeare, and that is almost as much as to say we have seen

another god. It wants originality though; the leading idea, the plot of the story, is Southey's. Have you read any German work?' (No.) 'Well, you have a new country to open upon you. Read Schiller's "Wallenstein," translated by Coleridge. Such an original, and such a translation! Have you read any of Hazlitt?' (Only the choice specimens of him in 'Tait.') 'Not read Hazlitt, nor De Stäel, nor Godwin, nor Schiller! I wonder how you got your taste to the standard it now reaches, and that it is not narrow and grovelling. The reading of Hazlitt was an epoch to me.' "

The "Giaour" and "Scotch Nationality" I have not been able to procure a sight of, and am indebted to my friend Mr. John Fowler, of Sheffield, for the following extract from the "Scotch Nationality,"—a poem, I am told, which virulently attacked the Scotch character, and of which Mr. Elliott was so heartily ashamed in later times, that he bought up and destroyed all the copies that fell in his way.

A DAY DREAM.

"WHILE keenly blew the biting North,
He dream'd his spirit wander'd forth.

* * * *

He seem'd to trudge beneath the pall
Of darkness supernatural.
The wind, that hurried sullenly,

Not o'er, but through a starless ocean,
(Like swift Time in Eternity.)

Whisper'd alone of life or motion ;
And soon that wind, like one grown old,
Expired—and all was gloom and cold.
Long then he roam'd the realms of night,
 * * his only light,
Which, glimmering pale on shadows, show'd
That death had paved with ice the road ;
And o'er a gulph of darkness lay
That narrow, strange, and dismal way.
He seem'd to move, with hollow tread,
O'er countless fragments of the dead,
 Yet could not trace
 Of limb or face ;
No bone, no frozen winding-sheet,
 Crackled beneath his feet ;
No sound was there, no flutter'd wing,
No leaf, no form, no living thing,—
No beating heart but his,—no air ;
But cold that pierced the soul was there ;
And horror which no tongue can tell,
And silence insupportable.
'Twas depth unplumed, 'twas gloom untrod,
'Twas shuddering thought alone with God !
And on he went alone,—alone—
And felt like life frozen into stone ;
Or life, in earth and gloom laid low,
With pangs untold, with speechless woe,
With buried soul ; that living death,
That direst life, which heaves no breath,
Which would, but cannot, move or moan,
Yet feels and bears, too weak to groan,
(While the worm pauses, as in awe,)
What life, unburied, hath not known,
And e'en abhors, in thought, to bear.

His tears were frozen in his heart :
 He knew he was, but knew not where ;
 He felt he was a thing apart
 From all companionship,—a bird
 That wings th' eternal calm unheard ;
 On death's wide waste the conscious one ;
 A flag above the waves, with none
 To tell that ship and crew are gone ;
 A sad memorial, never read ;
 A meteor in the eyeless gloom ;
 A blind, endanger'd wretch, unled,
 Who would have flown on the lightning's wing
 To clasp earth's foulest living thing.
 He fear'd no worse, but cursed his doom,
 And mutter'd, in his dreary mood,
 ' There is no hell but solitude ! * ' "

As a specimen of Elliott's prose composition I subjoin the following passage from his printed lectures, upon—

COWPER AND BURNS.

" I must now conclude, with a few observations on the lives and characters of the two great founders of the Modern School of Poetry. Perhaps no falsehood has been more frequently repeated than that men of genius are less fortunate and less virtuous than other men ; but the obvious truth that they who attempt little are less liable to failure than they who attempt much, will account for the proverbial good luck of fools. In our estimate of the sorrows and failings of literary men, we forget that sorrow is the common lot ; we forget, too, that the mis-

* Several of the ideas, and some of the couplets of this fragment are woven into his last poem, " Etheline."

fortunes and the errors of men of genius are recorded ; and that, although their virtues may be utterly forgotten, their minutest faults will be sure to find zealous historians. And this is as it should be. Let the dead instruct us. But slanderers blame, in individuals, what belongs to the species. ‘ We women,’ says Clytemnestra, in ‘Æschylus,’ when meditating the murder of her husband, and in reply to an attendant who was praising the gentleness of the sex, ‘ We women are—what we are.’ So is it with us all. Then, let every fault of men of genius be known ; but let not hypocrisy come with a sponge, and wipe away their virtues.

“ Of the misfortunes of Cowper we have all heard, and certainly he was unfortunate, for he was liable to fits of insanity. But it might be said of him that he was tended through life by weeping angels. Warm-hearted friends watched and guarded him with intense and unwearied solicitude ; the kindest-hearted of the softer sex, the best of the best, seem to have been born only to anticipate his wants. A glance at the world will show us that his fate, though sad, was not saddest ; for how many madmen are there, and how many men still more unfortunate than madmen, who have no living creature to aid, or soothe, or pity them ! Think of Milton—‘ blind among enemies !’

“ But the saddest incident in the life of Cowper remains to be told. In his latter days he was pensioned by the crown—a misfortune which I can forgive to him, but not to destiny. It is consoling to think that he was not long conscious of his degradation after the cruel kindness was inflicted on him. But why did not his friends—if weary of sustaining their kinsman stricken by the arrows of the Almighty, suffer him to perish in a *beggar’s* madhouse ? Would he had died in a ditch rather than this shadow had darkened over his grave ! Burns

was more fortunate in his death than Cowper; he lived self-supported to the end. Glorious-hearted Burns! Noble but unfortunate Cowper!

“Burns was one of the few poets fit to be seen. It has been asserted that genius is a disease—the malady of physical inferiority. It is certain that we have heard of Pope, the hunchback; of Scott and Byron, the cripples; of the epileptic Julius Cæsar, who, it is said, never planned a great battle without going into fits; and of Napoleon, whom a few years of trouble killed: whilst Cobbett (a man of talent, not of genius) would have melted St. Helena, rather than have given up the ghost with a full belly. If Pope could have leaped over five-barred gates, he probably would not have written his inimitable sofa-and-lap-dog poetry; but it does not follow that he would not have written the ‘Essay on Man:’ and they who assert that genius is a physical disease, should remember, that as true critics are more rare than true poets (we have only one in our language, William Hazlitt,) so very tall and complete men are as rare as genius itself, a fact well known to persons who have the appointment of constables. And if it be undeniable that God wastes nothing, and that we, therefore, perhaps seldom find a gigantic body combined with a soul of Æolian tones; it is equally undeniable that Burns was an exception to the rule—a man of genius, tall, strong, and handsome, as any man that could be picked out of a thousand at a country fair.

“But he was unfortunate we are told. Unfortunate! He was a tow-hackler who cleared six hundred pounds by the sale of his poems, of which sum he left two hundred pounds behind him, in the hands of his brother Gilbert; two facts which prove that he could neither be so unfortunate, nor so imprudent, as we are told he was.”

The following is a fair specimen of Elliott's power and style as a speaker, and shows how thoroughly practical he was, and what a keen eye he had in business transactions :—

“MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN.—Here is another Dead Stock to sell, for the benefit of the vendors! But if a majority of you are not canal proprietors, in the name of all creeping things, why are we to buy these dead ditches? And if we are to deal in dead things, why are we to deal in dead canals only? Why not buy dead road-coach-and-cart interests? Plenty of them can be had dog cheap, and worth nothing; capital bargains, as railway bargains go. I know a carrier whose interest might be bought for ten pounds, and he has a better claim on our charity than these canal gentlemen. If you commit one great stock error, you will never divide a shilling out of profits. Be cautious, then, for this motion is a trap—not, I hope, set by your directors, but for them; it is a trap, laid by a broken-down whale to catch railway gudgeons. It is founded on the assumption, that River Dun shares, which cost originally one hundred pounds per share, are worth one hundred and twenty pounds per annum per share for ever. For ever, mind! Now £120 is the interest of £3000 at 4 per cent. Then it is clear as figures can show it, that we are to give £3000 per share for River Dun shares, which is £500 per share more than they were ever worth, and I believe thirty times as much as they would sell for if offered to the market in mass, as they are offered to you—supposing that they would sell at all in that way, which I don't believe. Well, out of what are you to pay this £120 per share per annum? Not out of one penny per ton

per mile, freight and dues, for that will barely pay canal expenses, and railways can carry profitably at a halfpenny. Then you are to pay it out of the profits of your main line, and literally throw £100,000 away. But how do you know that you will have any profits? Your directors cannot be very sanguine on that point, if they are putting off the evil day, by paying dividends out of capital. But even if we were idiotic enough to enter into this partnership with the dead-alive on any terms, why are we to run all risks, and they none? Beware how you place yourselves in the position of parties, who out of their ultimate 3 or 4 per cent. will have to pay the deficits of their amalgamations, guaranteed at 6, 8, 10, and 12½ per cent., and yet by no means so preposterously guaranteed as your directors now propose that you shall guarantee the River Dun Co. If the Railway King himself, who will bite anything like bait, will take this bare hook, he ought to be called Gudgeon the Great. Don't buy a horse-laugh too dear. We are laughed at in all directions; in every train persons are shaking their sides at this expected hooking of railway gudgeons. A great fat fellow from near Bolton was laughing at us through his very guts this morning—and he shook mine! for mine are not so well lined as he intends his to be, if you pass this motion: he is a River Dun shareholder. You may laugh; some people laugh at funerals—the winners, I mean; but don't you give a splendid funeral to a dead interest, if the result is to be beggary and a parish coffin for your own. The proposal is monstrous; monstrously characteristic of the brazen modesty of the parties making it; and until it was made, I did not know that even their brass could bear so black a polish. Whom are we to enrich with our hard-earned savings? Men who are supporting the cause of the destruction of their

own property—and thus rush into railway speculation a hundred years before the time, by leaving nothing else to rush into? Look at their prospectus. Why, with one noble exception, there is hardly a man on the list who is not either a landowner and monopolist through bone and marrow, or a River Dun shareholder. Is it for such people that we have been toiling all our lives? I thought I had been toiling to keep the oppressor's foot from my neck, his greedy mouth from my children's trenchers. And what is this Dun and Coal Railway to pay, if made? Nothing to the good faith of shareholders; three thousand per cent. to the setters of the trap! Why, they are getting out, as shareholders, though they believe you to be stark mad. To be sure, the guarantee of madmen cannot be worth much. And mad indeed you are, if you are prepared to pass this motion. If it pass, you will see your shares at £50.* If it pass, I can have no faith in public bodies; for I must conclude that they can be led wrong at any time, by any party who will take the trouble.† ”

Allusion is made more than once in these memoirs to the ballad called “Devil Byron,” and to the tradition upon which it is founded. I transcribe it here, therefore, for the benefit of the reader, who, if I mistake not, will agree with me in thinking it one of the most extraordinary poems in our language.

* They were then at £117. They are now (September, 1849,) at £25.

† He got seven votes, out of about three hundred.

DEVIL BYRON.

A BALLAD.*

“A STRANGE man own'd yon Abbey once,
Men call'd him Devil Byron;
Yet he a sister had who loved
Well that man of iron.

And well he loved that sister—Love
Is strong in rugged bosoms;

* “I had the facts on which this ballad is founded from Luke Adams, an old forgerman, who had worked many years, when young, in a small Charcoal Bloomery near Newstead Abbey; but I have not adhered strictly to his narrative. The words uttered by the lady were ‘Speak to me, my lord!’ uttering which words, she was often seen on horseback, accompanying her brother in his drives. The character which Luke Adams gave me of the old lord of Newstead differs from the received and accredited one. He seems to have been rather a kind man. His rich neighbours sneered at him because he was poor, and hated him because the poor loved him. Never was it said of Devil Byron that he prosecuted any one for killing God’s hares; but Chaworth was a strict game-preserved. The duel, however, was not caused by disputes about game alone. Chaworth was in the habit of calling Byron ‘A poor little lord!’ his lordship being not only poor, but of low stature. My informant was himself a character. It is still told of him, that when he became too old to work, and retired to a quiet place, there to live on his club-money, (which he received from two or three clubs,) he could not sleep out of the sound of the Masbro’ forge-hammer! He lost his sight, at last, but still found his way to my house on the Saturdays, when he knew my boys were not at school, bringing gingerbread for them; and was never satisfied till they took it out of his pocket—a smile passing over his rough face, as he felt the touch of their hands.”

E'en as the barren-seeming bough
Oft' hoards richest blossoms.

Yet from his heart, when she espoused
A peasant, he dismiss'd her ;
And thenceforth Devil Byron spoke
Never, to his sister.

Therefore, whene'er he drove abroad,
She chased the Man of iron,
Rode by his wheels, and riding cried,
'Speak to me, Lord Byron !'

Thus, at his chariot's side, she pray'd ;
For was he not her brother ?
'Do speak to me, my lord !' she said ;
Was he not her brother ?

Her quiv'ring hand, her voice, her looks,
Might wring soft speech from iron ;
But he speaks not !—her heart will break :
He is Devil Byron.

Yet down his cheeks tears shoot, like hail ;
Then, speak, thou Angel's brother !
Why struggle, in thy burning soul
Wordless fire to smother ?

Oh, Power is cruel !—Wilful Man !
Why kill thy helpless sister ?
Relent ! repent ! already, lo,
Beauteous blight hath kiss'd her !

Men say, a spectre with thee walks,
And will not from thee sever;
A shadow—not, alas! thy own!
Pointing at thee ever.

Oh think of Chaworth rashly slain,
And wrath, too late repenting!
Think of the kiss men give the dead!
Vainly, then, relenting.

Think of thy sister's mother's grave;
Think of your days of childhood—
The little hands in fondness join'd,
Wandering through the wild-wood.

The hedgerose, then, was not so fair
As she, in gladness ranging;
Now, sorrowful as beautiful;
Changed, and sadly changing!

The wither'd hand, the failing voice,
Moved they the Man of iron?
The live rose took the dead one's hue:
God, forgive thee, Byron!

As rainbow fades, she perish'd. Then,
How fared the stubborn-hearted?
With her, the wrong'd and lost, he lived—
Never to be parted.

The Abbot's garden well he liked,
But there a shape was sighing;
There in each pale, reproachful flower,
Sinless love seem'd dying.

The bird that on the belfry wail'd,
It all her tones did borrow ;
The shadows in his banquet-hall
Wore her brow of sorrow.

Where'er he went, she with him went—
Alas, thou stubborn-hearted !
The grey old Abbey's gloom did groan,
' Life and Death be parted ! '

He wish'd, but did not pray, for death—
Pray, pray, thou Heart of iron !
Dying he heard her heart's last pray'r,
' Speak to me, Lord Byron.'

Dying, he saw her dying face ;
And as with poison'd lashes,
Its look'd forgiveness, its slow smile,
Smote him—He is ashes.

Well sleep the dead ; in holy ground
Well sleeps the Heart of iron ;
The worm that pares his sister's cheek,
What cares it for Byron ?

Yet when her night of death comes round,
They ride and drive together,
And ever when they drive and ride,
Wilful is the weather.

On mighty winds, in spectre-coach,
Fast speeds the Heart of iron ;
On spectre-steed, the spectre-dame—
Side by side with Byron.

The winds they blow rain, sleet, and snow,
To welcome Devil Byron ;
Through sleet and snow the hail doth go,
Ripped—like shot of iron.

A star ? 'Tis gone. The moon ? How fast
She hurries through wild weather !
The coach and steed chase moon and star,
Lost and seen together.

‘Halloo!’—The slain hath left his grave !
He knows thee, Heart of iron !
And with a laugh that dafts hellfire,
Hails thy sister, Byron !

Which is most sad of saddest things ?
The laughter ? or the weeping ?
Laughs Chaworth, while her Feast of Sighs
Love-in-Death is keeping ?

Thou ghastly thing ! thou mockery
Of life, and human doings !
With flame-like eyes, on shadows fix'd !
Shadows which are ruins !

Thou see'st but sadness in her smile,
And pity in her sadness,
And in her slander'd innocence
Pain, that once was gladness.

And canst thou—while Night groans—do less
Than weep for injured woman ?
Man ! is thy manhood manliness ?
Is she not a woman ?

Oh, Night doth love her! oh, the clouds
They do her form environ!
The lightning weeps—it hears her sob,
‘ Speak to me, Lord Byron!’

On winds, on clouds, they ride, they drive—
Oh, hark, thou Heart of iron!
The thunder whispers mournfully,
‘ Speak to her, Lord Byron!’

My God! thy judgments dreadful are
When thought its vengeance wreaketh,
And mute reproach is agony:
Now, thy thunder speaketh!

He doth not speak! he cannot speak;
Then, break, thou Heart of iron!
It cannot break! it cannot break!
I can weep for Byron.

The uttered word is oft a sin,
Its stain oft’ everlasting;
But, oh, that saddest unsaid word;
Its dumb guilt is blasting!

Eternity, the ever young
Hath, with fixed hand, recorded
The speechless deed unspeakable;
Ne’er to be unworded!

Oh, write it, then, ‘ in weeping blood,’
Ye purified and thwarted!
Oh, House of Brokenheartedness!
Spare the broken-hearted.

Tell not the fallen that he fell,
The foil'd that there are winners,
If He, whose name is Purity,
Died, to ransom sinners.

No, spare the wronger and the wrong'd,
Oh, ye, who wrongs inherit!
'A wounded spirit who can bear?'
Soothe the erring spirit!

He, earning least, and taking most,
May love the wrong in blindness,
Not needing less, but all the more,
Pity, help, and kindness."



REMARKS UPON ELLIOTT'S POETRY,

AND

Memoranda of the Poet.

REMARKS UPON ELLIOTT'S POETRY,

AND

MEMORANDA OF THE POET:

BY THOMAS LISTER.

THE heads of this discourse may be thus stated: The descriptive beauty and earnestness of Elliott's poetic genius, combining poetry with painting—with music—description with sentiment: The poet and philanthropist—the poet and seer.

“By the term ‘poetry with painting’ we do not necessarily understand that Elliott was a man who drew pictures by the aid of pencils and colours, but that the arts of design, the grouping and colouring of objects, were matters of earnest study to him; and that clear and vivid representation of all objects in nature coming within the reach of his vision, in a series of word paintings, were the result. My first walk with him on the banks of the Don, under Shirecliffe Wood, illustrated

the close attention he paid to such matters: 'Observe,' said he, 'the effect of the light on the water, as we stand on a level with it—it is like the gleaming of heated steel; I have not seen that effect in any painting.' Having crossed the river, and ascended the opposite hill, he said, 'Now look at the water.' I observed it was a beautiful blue. 'Do you perceive the cause of the change?' I not answering, he pointed upwards: 'It is the blue of the sky imaged down on the water—that is reflection; you have the light from above. Before, when on the same level, it was refraction.'

"When I accompanied him the first time to view the plot of ground on which he fixed his residence, we walked down the Vale of Dearne, by Storr Mill to Houghton Common, and he enlivened the way by producing a series of mental pictures. The substance of his conversation is permanently impressed on my mind, so that in default of any written memoranda I may hope faintly to recal it, though I cannot give the rich and varied tones of the voice, nor the soul that animated it. In the meadow path over Grange Bridge, looking at the ruins of Monk Bretton Priory and Lunn Wood beyond, he remarked, 'What a lovely subject for a sketch. Let us make our own landscape, and be our own artists. If you want to make a picture, place your arms thus;' extending his arms, and bringing the hands in contact before his head, 'here is my picture-frame and the picture in it. That further bank of the stream, with its shady trees, its variously coloured herbs and flowers, with the group of cattle in the meadow above it, shall be my foreground—that venerable ivy-clad ruin, and the old farm buildings, form the middle ground—and yon bold leafy wood, with those rich pastoral eminences, make as fine a background as could be wished.' Nor was he less happy in designing

pictures on a smaller scale. A little further, in one of those beautiful windings of the stream, he thus attracted my attention:—‘Observe that group of calves and young heifers, with their heads over a rail stretching across the bed of the stream, how picturesque they look, and how tranquilly they enjoy their retreat under the shade of those old trees. Many a painter would give his ears for such a subject.’ The trunk of an old tree, mottled finely with lichens and mosses, having a wreck of shattered boughs above adorned with ivy, was pointed out as another delightful subject. This trunk, which was in the bed of the stream at the lower end of Sunny Bank Wood, has since been swept away by some of the floods frequently occurring in the Dearne. ‘Here is a striking illustration of the laws of light and shade,’ said he, directing my attention to a bank by Oscar Wood, which was principally in the shade; ‘observe that thistle, with a bee feeding on the topmost flower, how richly they stand out in the light, every object around them in the shade. How the minute and the vast, the near and the remote, are here blended; and what is the connecting link? that straggling sunbeam escaping from the interstices of those cloud masses brings light from yon glorious orb millions of miles, to gild the humble flower and the feeding bee. That illustrates what I have sometimes told you of the faculty of imagination as distinct from fancy—its uniting, expanding power, and its tendency to the infinite. I like this valley of yours; it is a perfect sylvan retirement; it has not the grand features of our Don Valley under the Old Park Wood, but it has a sweeter character of its own—of beauty in repose.’

“There is ground for the application of the term ‘painter,’ in its literal sense, to Elliott. After his mind had been awakened to the study of flowers—a taste by

which he said he was lifted above the inmates of the alehouse a foot in mental stature,—he practised a little the art of painting landscapes in oil. One of the greatest treasures to me, in his library, was the noble work of Sowerby, giving, to the very life, coloured representations of all our British plants. ‘I am proud of that work,’ he said, ‘it made a poet of me—my aunt showed me how to draw the figures exactly by holding the plates, with a piece of thin paper before them, to the pane—it acted like a charm, and lead me to the fields and woods to search out these floral treasures. It was the turning point of my life, which decided whether I was to be a man or a malt swill!’ It is abundantly manifest that he not only possessed the faculty, but that he frequently introduced the very terms of the painter. The first example I give, to exemplify this, is extracted from a poem called ‘The Year of Seeds,’ which appeared in his last publication : *—

“ ‘Art thou a colourist? Mark how yon red
 Poppy, and that bright patch of yellow bloom,
 Cliff-borne above green depths and purple gloom,
 Like spark and blaze on smiling darkness shed,
 Give and take beauty! Mark, too, over head,
 How the rich verdure of this ancient tree,
 And the deep purple of the bank agree
 To thrive in partnership! And while the bed
 Of the clear stream, through tints of every hue,
 Lifts its bathed pebbles, lo! to brighten all,
 The little harebell brings its bit of blue,
 And is a gainer; happy to behold
 Red blessing green, and purple gilding gold,—
 Of light and shade a marriage festival!’

“ Again, what exquisite colouring, what knowledge of

* “More Prose and Verse,” by the Corn Law Rhymer.

light and shade, of the effect of trees and flowers growing over a stream, viewed in their natural position, and in their reflected aspect in the water, are manifest in these portions of his tribute to Burns:—

“ ‘ Be proud man-childed Scotland !
 Of earth’s unpolish’d gem,
 And bonny Doon, and Heaven aboon,
 For Burns has hallow’d them.
 Be proud, though sin dishonour’d
 And grief baptized thy child,
 As rivers run, in shade and sun,
 He ran his courses wild.
 Grieve not though savage forests
 Look’d grimly on the wave,
 Where dim-eyed flowers, and shaded bowers,
 Seemed living in the grave,’ etc.

“ The principles of the art of painting are not only developed in those parts of his writings which a fanciful judgment might arrange under this head—they pervade his whole poetry, in a greater degree in some poems than in others; and here I will endeavour, by an easy transition, to pass to my next division, and to connect painting by ‘ links of sweetness ’ with the sister art of music. With this view I will quote ‘ Lines written after seeing at Mr. J. Heppenstall’s, of Uppertorpe, near Sheffield, the plates of Audubon’s birds of America.’

“ ‘ Painting is silent music, so said one
 Whose prose was sweetest painting,’ etc.

“ *Poetry with Music.* The expression may seem unnecessary because obvious, as all true poetry should have music as one of its constituents; but how different in the notes themselves and their variations! I do not apply this phrase to Elliott solely on account of the melody or *rhythm* of his verses, for in this, as in the admirable

adaptation of the words to the thoughts, Coleridge, Tennyson, and many others in their lyrical writings, might well vie with him. But with Coleridge and Tennyson there is more of the melody of the inner soul, than that conquest of the elements of harmonious expression in external nature which Elliott has effected. From the gentle to the terrible all sounds in nature are made in unison with his spirit—from the gushing spring to the bursting torrent; from the whispering of the summer woods and the carols of their feathered inmates, to the struggle of the elements in their wrath; amid the groaning forest or lightning-shattered peak, he feels ever at home. I need but evidence one instance of the gentle and one of the stormy character, calling to your attention, as in the case of painting, how the very language of the art, as well as the spirit of music, mingle in his vivid descriptions:—

RIBBLEDIN; OR, THE CHRISTENING.*

“No name hast thou, lone streamlet,
That marriest Rivelin;
Here, if a bard may christen thee,
I call thee Ribbledin.
Here, where first murmuring from thine urn,
Thy voice deep joy expresses,
And down the rocks like music flows
The wildness of thy tresses.

* Mr. Wm. Howitt, in his beautiful book upon the “Homes and Haunts of the British Poets,” has the following passage upon the valley of the Rivelin:—“Our next visit was to the valley of the Rivelin, so often named in Elliott’s poetry. The Rivelin is one of the five rivers that run from the moorland hills and join near Sheffield; and the scenery is very peculiar, from the singular features which art and trade have added to those of nature. The

Dim world of weeping mosses!
A hundred years ago,
Yon hoary-headed holly tree
Beheld thy streamlet flow;
See how he bends him down to hear
The tune that ceases never!
Old as the rocks, wild stream, he seems,
While thou art young for ever.

river is one of those streams which show their mountain origin by their rapid flow over their rugged beds, scattered with masses of stone. It has a tinge of the peat moss, and is overhung by woods and alternate steep banks of sandstone rock, clothed with the bilberry plant. But what gives it, to a stranger, the most striking character, are the forges and grinding-wheels, as they call them, scattered along them. Formerly these stood chiefly out amongst the neighbouring hills, being turned by the streams that descend from them, and you still find them in all the neighbouring valleys, the rivulets and rivers which run along them being damned up into a chain of ponds, which give a peculiar character to the scene. These ponds look dark brown, as from the rust of iron, which is ground off with the water, and are generally flanked by dark alders, or are overhung by the woods which clothe the sides of the valleys; and you now come to a forge where the blast roars, and the flame glances out from the sooty chimney-tops, and the hammers resound and tinkle in various cadences from within; and now to low mill-like buildings, with huge wheels revolving between two of them, or beside one of them: and these are the grinding-mills, or wheels, as they are termed. Formerly they were all turned by these streams, which are conveyed in channels, cut for them, and spouts, and let fall on those great wheels; but now steam is applied, as to everything else, and large grinding-wheels as they are still called, that is, mills, meet you along all the lower parts of the town, as they still require a good supply of water for their engines, and for their wet grinding, that is, to keep their grinding-stones wet for some particular articles. Owing to this introduction of steam, as you advance further up amongst the moorland hills and streamlets, you find the old and picturesque grinding-wheels falling to decay.

Would that I were a river,
 To wander all alone
 Through some sweet Eden of the wild,
 In music of my own ;

Such is the scenery of Rivelin. Far up, solitude and falling wheels give a pleasing melancholy to the scene; but as you return nearer to Sheffield, you see the huge hammers of forges put in motion by stream or steam, thumping away at the heated bars of iron, while water is kept trickling upon their great handles to keep them cool."

Elliott gives the following description of these five rivers, alluded to by Howitt, in his "Village Patriarch."

"Five rivers, like the fingers of a hand,
 Flung from black mountains, mingle, and are one
 Where sweetest valleys quit the wild and grand,
 And eldest forests, o'er the sylvan Don,
 Bid their immortal brother journey on,
 A stately Pilgrim, watched by all the hills.
 Say, shall we wander where, through warriors' graves,
 The infant Yewden, mountain cradled, trills
 Her Doric notes? or where the Loxley raves
 Of broil and battle, and the rocks and caves
 Dream yet of ancient days? or where the sky
 Darkens o'er Rivelin, the clear and cold,
 That throws his blue length, like a snake, from high?
 Or where deep azure brightens into gold
 O'er Sheaf, that mourns in Eden? or where rolled,
 On tawny sands, through regions passion wild
 And groves of love, in jealous beauty dark,
 Complains the Porter, nature's thwarted child,
 Born in the waste, like headlong Wiming? Hark,
 The poised hawk calls thee Village Patriarch?
 He calls thee to his mountains! Up, away!
 Up, up, to Standedge! higher still ascend,
 Till kindred rivers from the summit grey
 To distant seas their course in beauty bend;
 And, like the lives of human millions blend,
 Disparted waves in one immensity!"

And bathed in bliss, and fed with dew,
 Distilled o'er mountains hoary,
 Return unto my home in heaven
 On wings of joy and glory !

Or that I were a skylark,
 To soar and sing above,
 Filling all hearts with joyful sounds,
 And my own soul with love !
 Then o'er the mourner and the dead,
 And o'er the good man dying
 My song should come like buds and flowers
 When music warbles flying,' etc.

“The ascent of Win Hill, and the storm witnessed on its summit, will supply one of the noblest amongst many instances throughout his writings, of the mastery this poet exercises over the mightier elements of the minstrel's art:—

“‘Blow, blow, thou breeze of mountain freshness, blow !

Stronger and fresher still as we ascend,
 Strengthen'd and freshen'd till the land below
 Lies like a map ! On ! on ! those clouds portend
 Hail, rain, and fire ! Hark ! how the rivers send
 Their skyward voices hither, and their words
 Of liquid music ! See how blueely blend
 The east moors with the sky ! The lowing herds
 To us are silent now, and hush'd the songful birds.

* * * *

High on the topmost jewel of thy crown,
 Win Hill ! I sit bare-headed, ancle deep
 In tufts of rose-cupp'd bilberries ; and look down
 On towns that smoke below, and homes that creep
 Into the silvery clouds, which far off keep
 Their sultry state ! and many a mountain stream,
 And many a mountain, 'vale, and ridgy' steep ;
 The Peak and all his mountains, where they gleam
 Or frown, remote or near, more distant than they seem !

There flows the Ashop, yonder bounds the Wye,
 And Derwent here towards princely Chatsworth tends;
 But, while the Nough steals purple from the sky,
 Lo! northward far, what giant shadow bends?
 A voice of torrents, hark! its wailing sends:
 Who drives yon tortured cloud through stone-still air?
 A rush! a roar! a wing! a whirlwind rends
 The stooping larch! The moorlands cry prepare!
 It comes! ye gore-gorged foes of want and toil beware!
 It comes! behold! black Blakelow hoists on high
 His signals to the blast from Gledhill's brow.

* * * *

Now expectation listens, mute and pale,
 While ridged with sudden foam the Derwent brawls;
 Arrow-like comes the rain, like fire the hail;
 And hark! Mam-Tor on shuddering Standedge calls;
 See, what a frown o'er castled Winnat falls!
 Down drops the death-black sky! and Kinderscont,
 Conscious of glory, laughs at intervals;
 Then lifts his helmet, throws the thunder out,
 Bathes all the hills in flame, and hails their stormy shout.'

The poem from which the above extract is taken is one of many noble productions, in which graphic descriptions of the poet's native scenery abound. The whole basin of the Don and its tributaries, exhibiting every kind of scene, from the picturesque well-wooded valleys and fertile plains of south Yorkshire—the green fountained dales on the moor edges to the innermost recesses and bleakest heights of the western range of hills, known by the appellation of 'the back-bone of England'—may be justly said to have gained a deeper interest from the illustrations of his powerful pen. The upper part of this region, extending to the well-heads of the Don, Dearne, Derwent, and Mersey, whence the infant feeders

of these rivers diverge to different seas, he may fairly claim as his own—being new poetic ground:—and to him we are indebted for the embodiment of some of our fairest and grandest scenes in deathless verse. From Win Hill, southward, ‘King of the Peak,’ and Lord’s Seat, overlooking his own sweet valley of Rivelin, to Blakelow Scar, commanding the Woodhead valley, northward, he has sung of their diversified aspects and old recollections, both in his longer poems, as ‘The Letter,’ and ‘The Village Patriarch;’ in his shorter lyrics, as his touching ‘Farewell to Rivelin;’ and in his sonnets, which also embrace a wider range, yielding pleasing recollections of more renowned Yorkshire scenes, as Bolton, and Fountain’s Abbey, and the massive crags of Brimham. The latter species of verse, as well as hexameters, were tried as experiments; showing, as his various correspondence proves, how much the mere form of metrical composition had been an object of his culture. On one occasion he wrote me as follows:—‘I now send a legitimate sonnet for your Doncaster friend, (the editor of the *Gazette*;) I will send you three more, with an explanatory note—one of them in the legitimate form, and the other two in measures which I think more harmonious and more agreeable with the genius of our language. But it does not follow that my practice is right. I will write them on purpose.’ In the communication which accompanied these sonnets, he gave his reason for preferring the form alluded to—which is simply an extension of Spenser’s melodious Stanza, of nine lines to fourteen, the limit of the sonnet. ‘The Spenserian Stanza,’ he remarked, ‘preceded by five lines linked to it in melody, and concluding occasionally with an Alexandrine, is the best which an English sonneteer can employ.’ Space forbids

me to give more than the conclusion of this Spenserian sonnet, and portions of the Petrarchan or legitimate forms. Though marked by that sententious brevity, which is a distinguishing feature of Elliott, in prose or poetry, and containing the same elements of pictorial delineation and musical expression already pointed out, and here manifesting themselves in the changeful hues of earth and sky, and the hymning of the forest trees to that Being 'who makes the clouds his harp strings,' yet with all these merits it is doubtful whether even Elliott can make the sonnet popular to the English mind, or appreciated with more than passing interest, except by the student.

"He admonishes the young writer, whose hopes are high for the advancement of the dawning age to earnestness in the task, which, without a sense of his true mission, should not be undertaken:—

* * *

"As the rose,
 Growing beside the streamlet of the field,
 Sends sweetness forth on every breeze that blows;
 Bloom like the woodbine where the linnets build;
 Be to the mourner as the clouds, that shield,
 With wings of meeken'd flame, the summer flower;
 Still in thy season, beautifully yield
 The seeds of beauty; sow eternal power,
 And wed eternal Truth! though suffering be her dower.
 Don whispers audibly; but Wharncliffe's dread,
 In speechless adoration, hymns the Lord;
 While, smiting his broad lyre with thunder stored,
 He makes the clouds his harp-strings. Gloom is spread
 O'er Midhope, gloom o'er Tankersley, with red
 Streak'd; and noon's midnight silence doth afford
 Deep meanings, like the preaching of the Word
 To dying men. Then let thy heart be fed
 With honest thoughts. * * *

Yes, minstrel! bear to him who toils and sighs,
 The primrose and the daisy, in thy rhyme;
 Bring to his workshop odorous mint and thyme;
 Shine like the stars on graves, and say, arise,
 Seed sown in sorrow! that our Father's eyes
 May see the bright consummate flower of mind;
 And the great heart of ransom'd human kind,
 Sing in all homes the anthem of the wise,
 "Freedom is Peace! Knowledge is Liberty!
 Truth is Religion!"

"To connect this portion of my theme with the next, viz: *description blending with sentiment*, I quote from one of his best poems, 'Etheline,' which, for musical flow and sustained beauty, is not exceeded by any of his choicest productions. I select the striking description of Wharnccliffe. The poem of 'Etheline,' dedicated to Miss E. Rendall, which at first was slighted by the press, has a peculiar value to me, not only as effecting a conquest over the difficulty experienced by most poets, in what Byron calls 'the fatal facility of the octosyllabic measure,' but from the interesting circumstances in which it stands to myself. The first intimation I had of its existence was in the following letter:—

"*Hargate Hill, Jan. 3, 1849.*

"DEAR SIR,—Thank you for securing *The Spectator* for me. If I live till summer, I could like to re-visit Conisbro' with you. A result of our visit is a long poem, which I think my best. Edlington Wood, I am told, is worth a visit.

"With our best wishes to you both, I am yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"On my next visit I asked to see the piece written respecting our trip to Conisbro' Castle. 'It is a long poem,' he said, 'of many hundred lines; you can't read

it now, we have other matters to engage us this evening; stay all night, and you shall have it at full length in the morning. I took the idea of the poem from your remark, "that the Don Valley looked like the bed of an ancient lake." I have transformed it into a lake, girt with its vast primeval woods.' Not being able to accept his invitation for the night, I never saw the manuscript; and on a subsequent visit, full of pleasant and painful reminiscences, I took my leave of him, and of his kind-hearted family, without having had my longing to see the poem gratified. When I saw his posthumous publication it was with mingled pleasure and regret. Its beautiful construction surpassed my warmest hopes, and proved that his hand had not forgotten its mastery of the lyre to the last—but many inquiries which I fain would have made of the author were rendered hopeless by the stern finisher—Death.

“ ‘O’er Wharnccliffe of the Demons thou,
 Dear Ellen, hast a wanderer been;
 Thy second letter places now
 Before my soul the beauteous scene.
 But thou hast named a name that brings
 Back the deplored and hopeless past,
 And o’er remember’d Wharnccliffe flings
 An angel’s shadow flitting fast:
 Why didst thou name that mournful name?
 Beautiful in its worth and woe,
 Over my sadden’d heart it came
 Like funeral music wailing low;
 Or like a deep cathedral toll
 At midnight swung o’er Witham’s wave,
 Proclaiming that a weary soul
 Had cast his staff into the grave.
 Oh, never more will Lycid see
 That relic of the forest old,

Which spread like an eternity
Its green night over plain and wold!
Grey Wharnccliffe, and the oaks that stand
Like spectres of their sires sublime;
Yet how unlike, though old and grand,
Those giants of the olden time!
Symbols of age-long funerals,
'They frown'd o'er fear's suspended breath,
And pillar'd in their living halls
The deathless might of mental death.
Oh, Superstition! cruel, blind,
False, restless, fair as ocean's foam,
How shall I paint? where shall I find,
Save in man's darkness, thy dark home?'

"The expression 'Wharnccliffe of the Demons' alludes to a wild supernatural poem written by him at an early period. The present poem 'Etheline,' the execution of which is better than the plan or the strange groundwork of the tale, embodies a powerful censure against the superstitions of all times, while delineating those of our pagan forefathers, whose cruel altars he places on the giant crags, amid the deepest forest recesses of old Wharnccliffe. The allusion to a departed friend in the plaintive spirit of Milton's *Lycidas*, adds that sombre tinge of gloom which in one form or another is seldom absent from his finest compositions. His city-bred reviewers and transcendental critics may slight 'Etheline,' and pronounce it, as some of them have been pleased to do, a failure; it may be, to those who have communed little with their own hearts amid the quiet shades of retirement, nor taught themselves to feel the beauty which exists, apart from the polished circle, in objects overlooked or rarely glanced upon, nor stilled the cravings for excitement in the majestic temple of creation. To bring it to the test of performances rather than words,

let one of these transcendentalists attempt what he whom they call a realist has here achieved. In this further selection, for example, are portions of a richer delineation of forest scenery than the above. Let those who have been fascinated with the opening page of 'Ivanhoe'—calling up before the mind, and peopling with beings in accordance with the scene the vast tracts of forest land extending from Wharnccliffe (haunt of the fabled Dragon of Wantley) to Wentworth, and the sloping heights that overlook the confluence of the Rother and the Don—let such who have glowed over this picture (and what Yorkshire reader has not) of our own native region, as it existed in the time of the Crusades, throw their imaginations back a thousand years previous to that era, to realize Elliott's embodiment of the same scenes in the times of the Druids, when the vast primeval forest

‘Spread like an eternity
Its green night over plain and wold,’

ere the Roman had hacked his way through its tangled depths, or the Saxon had planted his homestead amid its glades.

“‘They traversed realms of verdant night,
And many a treeless isle of light,
Whose peaceful bliss the eyes of love
Watch'd fondly through the blue above;
A wilderness of shaded flowers,
A wilderness of virgin bowers,
Of beauty calm not passionless,
And lonely song, a wilderness;
Far on, on, far and long they went,
Through paths of green bewilderment,
Where oft the Ouzle, perch'd on high,
Beneath his clouds, above his woods,
Pour'd his full notes in gushing floods,
Flattering the wood-rill tunefully,

Then listened to its still reply,
In all a bard's regality.

They reach'd at last the mount where stood
The father of the boundless wood,
An oak, before whose vastness man,
Dwarf'd to a gnat's dimensions, shrunk.
Twelve full-sized men had failed to span
With outstretch'd arms his giant trunk :
One mighty limb, extended forth,
Might have a war-ship's frame supplied ;
One shoulder, twisted to the north,
A thousand winters had defied.

The tree was call'd the " Wizard's Chair,"
And in his hollow trunk the gloom
Reveal'd an uncouth banquet room ;
Perchance, in after ages, dined
In such a tree stout Robin Hood,
Amid the depths of Barnsdale wood,
Feasting his men on hart and hind.'

" Under the head of *Poetry*, where *description blends with sentiment*, I might class a large proportion of the poems of Elliott ; indeed, the secret of beauty and power combined in his strains, lies in the vehemence and fervour with which he throws the whole feelings of his soul into his subject. This is also the reason of the distaste with which, in some circles, he is regarded ; he being a fearless, out-spoken man, not caring whether his words of terrible earnestness accord with the canonical rules of poetic taste, or conventional propriety, so that they only convey the meaning he intends. His mental vision, in a direct line, was clearer than that of most men. 'My mind,' he said, 'is the mind of my eyes. All my ideas are from my own observations, or what I have made my own by reflection on the thoughts of other men. Some of my

finest thoughts come from the minds of others, but so adapted to my own that the theft is not traced. I am enriched, and I leave them no poorer; for instance, Homer, in Cowper's translation—the best our language boasts—says, of the meeting of two armies: "The earth beneath them trembled, and the heavens sang them together with a trumpet's voice." I thus transfer the thought:—

"O light that cheer'st all life from sky to sky,
As with a hymn to which the stars reply."

The trumpet I transform to a hymn, and the change is complete and undetected.'

"To describe and narrate well, are excellent qualities in a poet; but to invest the object with sentiment, to pour soul and feeling therein, is a much higher advance in the art. I will exemplify this by a selection from 'The Splendid Village,' where the twice exiled victim of usurping power breathes a sad farewell to England, which he thus passionately apostrophizes:—

" 'Yet in my heart thy verdant Eden smiles;
Land where my Hannah died and hath no tomb,
Still in my soul thy dewy roses bloom.
E'en mid Niagara's roar remembrance still
Shall hear thy throstle by the lucid rill,
At lucid eve—the bee at stillest noon;
And when clouds chase the heart-awaking moon,
The mocking bird, where Erie's waters swell,
Shall sing of fountain'd vales and Philomel;
To my sick soul bring, over worlds of waves,
Dew-glistening Albion's rocks, and dripping caves,
But with her, redbreast, linnet, lark, and wren,
Her blasted homes and much-enduring men.'

"That perfect little poem, 'The Dying Boy to the

Sloe-Blossom,' is an exquisite illustration of the principle here enunciated; and equally sweet and perfect are 'Come and Gone;' 'To the Bramble Flower;' and 'The Wonders of the Lane.' Many choice pieces also adorn his last publication, such as 'Lyrics for my Daughters;' the pleasure of reading which is only exceeded by that of hearing them sung and played—the heart mingling with the strain—in the household circle for which they were composed; 'God Save the People;' and 'The Sun's Bird,' breathing the same spirit as the Ettrick Shepherd's 'Skylark,' but less sustained in its exultant cheerfulness. These fully prove that the poetic gift was as potent, when he willed it, in his declining years, as in his manly prime. Yet in these posthumous volumes, it must be mournfully confessed, there are many blemishing verses, which it could have been hoped his riper judgment had either not composed, or rejected from an after collection—it being quite possible, as he himself has sometimes proved, to utter strong truths without offensive language.

"A judicious selector might extract a cabinet of gems from his works. Such, one would think, might find favour in the eyes of those who have been repelled by what they consider the violence, approaching to coarseness, of his political opinions. They who have said that the Corn Law Rhymer's fame will die, when the exciting questions of partizan strife that brought him into notice, have subsided, may be partially right in their opinion; that the lower aspect of politics, the harping on party measures, is inimical to poetry; but, they are deplorably wrong, when they pronounce him who has made politics so important a staple of his productions, to be no poet. The pieces named above, and many more from which there is a strong temptation to quote, are equal to any of their class. They may stand by the master-pieces

of Coleridge, Keats, and Tennyson. And how is it that Elliott may compare, without loss, in the same kind of poetry—natural description blending with natural sentiment—with men more richly endowed with the poet's best gift, imagination, than he admitted himself to be? The response is simply this: because his heart was homed with nature; he had familiarized himself more with her varied aspects, and listened more attentively to her teachings than any of the ideal poets, Wordsworth alone excepted. This venerable bard, sojourning nearly all his long existence among his native hills, open to all the influences of nature, revealing to other hearts her secret whisperings to his own, after toiling through an age of contumely, lived to be hailed, by general consent, as her ministering priest. In one important element, passion, that which gives life to all composition, Elliott possessed an advantage over the last hallowed bard, as over all modern poets, unless Byron be deemed his equal, who excels him in splendour of diction, but yields to him in reverential love and knowledge of the surrounding creation. Elliott's remarkable definition, 'Poetry is impassioned Truth,' paradox though it seem, is ably borne out in his masterly lectures, first published in 'Tait,' and now the choicest of them in 'More Prose and Verse.'

"These lectures, while they are true exponents of his poetical views, are written in a style, beautiful as it is brief, equal to that of his verse, and would be a profitable study to some of his judges, who disallow this claim. The condensed fulness of such prose would make many of these scribes rich indeed. Referring once to these lectures, he remarked, 'You ask how I attained my peculiar prose style? There is a secret lies in that: I have served a long apprenticeship to it. I allow no word

to pass in composition that does not answer my purpose. I can afford to wait, and the world also, until the right word be found. I never wrote an idle line in my life, nor used a word for effect, or for rhyme, unless it gave my full meaning. Would our numerous writers and young poets look to this, they would not rush into authorship without feeling assured they had a call to the work.'

"Again, to cause my divisions of the subject to flow easily into each other, I connect this head with the succeeding one, by an epistle to his friend Francis Fisher, who was then living in Sheffield, in which rare powers of description, and wondrously varied sentiment, combine with an ardent, active *philanthropy*; exhibiting also, the quaintly humorous side of the poet's mind, mingled with touching pathos. This was an experiment in 'Metrical Epistolary Composition,' written to drive away painful thoughts, as he states in a subsequent letter to F. Fisher, apologizing for sending it to 'Tait,' 'though there is nothing in it which could hurt his feelings, or injure or prejudice him.' That amiable youth, now deceased, whose loss is, no doubt, the one introduced in the Wharnccliffe reminiscence, would excuse everything therein, knowing the source from which it sprung; but there are some passages, which, to the hard-judging conventional world, had better have been erased; and such omission would have made this one of the finest specimens of the Rhymed Epistle—worthy to rank with those of his cherished favourites, Cowper and Burns:—

" 'This sixteenth morn of new-styled May
Brings me your letter. Ah, you say,
You cannot come to Hargate Hill;
I'm sorry, but my bees are come.
There's gold, there's fire, on Hargate Hill;

The forests kindle into green ;
 Sun-bright the landscape burns between,
 And bees hum o'er my apple bloom.
 You will not come, but they are come,
 The bees, my punctual bees, are come.
 Oh, when arrives my hour of doom,
 Bury me where the orchards bloom,
 That to my grave the bees may come ;
 And while the wren his dinner gets,
 Murmur a song of violets.
 I've pass'd with bees some happiest hours,
 For well they know, I dwell with flowers :
 They love me, don't they, little wags !
 Ay, just as heirs do miser bags :
 My flowers they seek, my flowers, not me.
 Good taste is thine, my bonny bee.
 As skylarks love the clouded sky,
 Where bees and flowers are, there am I.
 Who loves not flowers ? I know not who :
 But this I know most good folk do.
 No foe of flowers could I forgive,
 They are my life, in them I live ;
 But oh ! there's frailty in their beauty,
 How mutely making sadness duty.

* * * *

My steps to health are slow and sure,
 My choking fits are few and fewer.
 Thanks to the air of Hargate Hill,
 And breeze, and bee, and flower, and rill ;
 And rides, and drives, in carriage low,
 To Nostell, Watchley, xilla'd Mar,
 Tower'd Bilham, Castle-Conisbro',
 Or palaced Wentworth, famous far ;—
 And pathless walks o'er sweetest thyme,
 By fountain'd Howell's dewy chime,
 Or Waltheof's moat, or hall of Grime ;
 Through woods that wave in golden rhyme,
 To roofless mill—half crushed by time—
 And grey historic oak sublime.'

To complete this aspect of his character, and to evince his intense desire for the social and moral elevation of the working community, I give another extract from his last published work, the closing prayer of his Temperance ballad, mingled as that effusion is with harsh uncouth expressions and startling views :—

“ ‘ Lord, grant to poor o’er-labour’d man
More leisure, and less prayer,
More church, less priest—and homes for inns,
More libraries and fewer sins ;
More music and less care.

And when the tardy Sabbath dawns,
Bid townsmen leave behind
The goldfinch, smother’d on his perch,
Gin-shop and chapel, jail and church,
And drink the mountain wind.

Or teach the artizan to seek
Some village house of prayer,
And kneel an apparition meek,
Amid the rustics red and hale,
And humbly worship there.

Or bid him (in the temple, built
By skill Divine for all,)
Expound to pallid listeners near,
While rose-check’d pilgrims stop to hear
The words of Christ or Paul.

There in lone shelter’d dales, amid
Their patriarchal trees,
Beneath the skylark’s quivering wing,
Let parents, sons, and daughters, sing
Great Handel’s harmonies.

Then to the dome of boundless blue,
 O'er-roofing sea and land,
 Triumphant hope and faith will rise,
 And with the anthems of the skies
 Mingle their anthem grand.

And sinners saved shall weep again
 For sins repented long,
 And broken-hearted, though forgiven,
 Repeat in music-hallow'd Heav'n
 Earth's spirit-warbled song.'

"In a note to this passage, which it must be borne in mind is made to proceed from the lips of a poor reformed sot, Elliott says: 'Yes, more music. Do I then mean that churches and chapels in towns should be deserted? No, let the rich attend them, for they can breathe fresh air when they please, which the poor can only breathe on the "poor man's day."' He suggests the building of churches and chapels at the railway stations. By the phrase 'less prayer,' which may appear irreverent, I would understand shorter prayers, and more to the purpose. The context bears out this view. To 'prayer, the soul's sincere desire,' he cannot object. He frequently exhorts

'Him who toils six days in seven
 To climb the hills amid their flowers to pray,'

on the only day when he can refresh his toil-worn frame in the free country air. Doubtless Elliott had been struck with the contrast between a long drawn-out supplication, and the simple heart-utterance of the Lord's Prayer that concludes it, as though the speaker pronounced unconsciously in the fulness of these few closing words, an expressive condemnation of his past lengthened effort. The noblest models of the effective Teacher he

held out in the characters of Christ and Paul, as enforced in this piece, and embodied in 'The Ranter,' where 'preaching ought to be its own reward'—a task of love. The religion he advocated was one of the spirit rather than of form; of deeds rather than of words. One of the evils of this age, which he never failed to enter his strong protest against, was that of many words in the expression of few or feeble thoughts. A frequent exclamation of his, when sick of the interminable disquisitions of this much-writing, long-talking age was, 'O that men would see the beauty of brevity.' In a very characteristic letter, he binds the lecturer with almost too close a tether—long enough if a dull affair, but where interest is manifested, one hour might be allowed, with a few minutes' grace to wind up. 'No lecture should exceed *three quarters of an hour in the delivery*. Always send your audience away full yet hungry, rather than tired and wanting. Speak slowly and clearly, standing bolt upright; if you cannot speak like one having authority, what right have you to speak at all? Use very few long sentences. Interpose round shot (short ones) for emphasis, also for safety; you may want time to breathe. If you extemporise, you may as a Quaker use the Quaker's privilege (as Emerson does) in the occasional dignity of silence!'

"The public lecturer he looked upon as a mighty instrument in the work of social progression, and in the above he has well prescribed the rules of his calling. Linked with this, as co-operating to the same end, were educational and literary institutions. He was an advocate for popular education long before that class of objections to any enlarged national scheme of it which have wearied the world of late had even an existence in thought. He at one time

contemplated, 'under a solemn sense of a duty to be performed,' to write 'Educational Rhymes.' It is to be regretted that he consigned such a noble task to any one else, either too indolent or incompetent to carry out his enlightened instructions. The text laid down by him, being for the good of mankind, may be introduced here; the objection to exhibiting private correspondence is lessened by considering this part of the communication as more of the nature of public property than such as is but individual in its character. From an interesting letter, dated 1839, written in the indulgent spirit he was wont to manifest towards his young correspondents, he thus touches on the question referred to: 'What a name you may win, and what good you may do, by writing short pieces, after the manner of your Temperance Rhymes, to be called Education Rhymes. What a world of pathos, beauty, hope, humour, and merciful sarcasm, is within your reach! Be this your text, to be expounded in a thousand ways, with a thousand sad and beautiful elucidations—"From national ignorance result not drunkenness only, but all other public evils!" When you conquered the rare power of expressing every-day and common-life thoughts in rhyme, you bent the bow of Ulysses. This power, and your love of the beautiful, with your knowledge of the people, and your graphic power to paint them, all point you out as the man who is to be the Education Rhymer. What felicitous opportunities you will have of introducing your fine pictures of rural scenery, and what might be and ought to be happiness! What a universe of sorrowful thoughts, and sweet contrasts, and heavenly anticipations. But do not go out of your way to seek poetry. I find some of your very best in your 'Temperance Rhymes,' and it is found in them because it came unsought. For instance:

‘Such joys are but the meteor’s flash
That through the darkness gleams;
Their memories knotted cords that lash
The thoughtless from their dreams.’

“And here is a capital bit of education poetry :—

‘*Drunkard*—I cannot read a single line,
Nor spell a single word.’

Remove the great cause of evil, and not intemperance only, but all its other bad consequences will cease,’ etc. The best plea for this extract is the importance of Elliott’s testimony to the great question which has enlisted already the proud names of Chalmers, Vaughan, Earl Carlisle, Cobden, Dawson, and a host of worthies, who have pleaded for national enlightenment in their respective spheres, upon such comprehensive principles as reason and conscience dictated to them was best. To wait until all sects have made up their minds as to the plan upon which a National Education shall be founded, were as hopeless as the aim of Charles V. to subdue the world to one faith. Not alone in expressive prose, terse, full, and musical, but in more varied verse, Elliott has proved himself an effective pleader in this cause; witness, among other meritorious poems, ‘The Press;’ ‘The Home of Taste;’ and the lines on the ‘Sheffield Mechanics’ Exhibition.’ The last closes with an impressive appeal to the classes who have power to do something effectual in giving the first right impulse to the faculties and habits of the rising race. These prove that Elliott is no malignant agitator, but an earnest tranquillizer of those conflicting elements of society which threaten to spread, like a wasting torrent, when unwisely influenced or left to their own unregulated course :—

'Truth, Mercy, Knowledge, Justice,
 Are powers that ever stand;
 They build their temples in the soul,
 They work with God's right hand.

* * * *

Then trader, lord, or yeoman,
 If thou a patriot art;
 If thou wouldst weep to see the light,
 From England's name depart,
 Her streets blood-flooded, and her plains
 In boundless conflagration,
 Instruct her poor benighted sons,
 And save a sinking nation.
 Shall we not lift the lowly,
 Whom law and custom ban?
 O help us to exalt and praise
 God in the mind of man,' etc.

This, in its aspirations, is closely linked with his prophetic language in that sublime hymn, where he looks forward to the time—

'When man, by painful ages taught,
 Shall build at last on truthful thought,
 And wisdom won from sorrow.'

"To this I add, in conclusion, the magnificent close of 'The Ranter,' foretelling the certain triumph of commercial freedom, of which he lived to see the fulfilment. He thus anticipates the ultimate achievements of 'world-reforming commerce,' of which he was at once the prophet and dauntless pioneer:—

'When o'er the enfranchised nations thou wilt shower,
 Like dew-drops from the pinions of the dove,
 Plenty and Peace; and never more on thee
 Shall bondage wait; but as the thoughts of love,
 Free shalt thou fly, unchainable and free,
 And men henceforth shall call thee liberty.'"





Recollections of Ebenezer Elliott,

HIS FAMILY, AND FRIENDS.

THE LATE MR. PAUL RODGERS.

SINCE the following MSS. came to my hand, the author has been gathered to his long home. It was not my good fortune to know much of him, but what little I knew, and more that I heard, impressed me very much in his favour. He was an intelligent, affable, and most kind-hearted man, and was esteemed as such in his town and neighbourhood. He was first introduced to me as a friend of Elliott's, and it is in this light that he now appears before the reader in the notes and reminiscences which follow. As a brief account of his life and struggles may not, however, be uninteresting, I will subjoin the following memoir, extracted from *The Sheffield Independent*, of September 27th, 1851:—

THE LATE MR. PAUL RODGERS was a man so well known and so much respected that his departure from amongst us must be widely regretted. Although his life was unmarked by any striking events, his characteristics was strong and well defined. Born at Greasbrough, near Rotherham, in the year 1788, he was at an early age bound apprentice to a shoemaker. Being of a serious turn of mind, he joined the Methodists, and in the course of time became one of their local preachers. He married, and settled at Greasbrough, working at his trade and using his best exertions to support a large family of children. Though possessed of little school learning, he was a reader and a thinker. To amuse himself he tried his hand at literary composition, and his productions won not merely the approbation of his village companions, but also the praise of individuals of superior judgment. He gained the intimate friendship of several of the then popular Methodist preachers of the

Rotherham Circuit, and especially of the Rev. Francis Hall, the late incumbent of Greasbrough. His opinions on certain religious doctrines changed, and he ceased to be a member of the Wesleyan Connexion. Speaking of this in after years, he said, "To the Methodists, amongst whom I was brought up, and with whom I was pleasantly connected for many years, I retain a constant and deep feeling of respect: and certain I am, could the same belief have been preserved by any legitimate efforts of my own understanding, the pleasant and prolonged intercourse with the friends of my youth, would not be broken by any choice of mine." He contributed to a magazine, which was published in the neighbouring village of Wath, and his writings attracted considerable attention. Our townsman, G. C. Holland, M.D., was not slow to recognise the abilities of the rustic author; and through his influence, in the beginning of 1833, Mr. Rodgers was induced to leave his native village, and to take up his abode in Sheffield. For several years Mr. Rodgers was engaged as secretary to the Sheffield Mechanics' Institution. In that capacity he became acquainted with men of eminence from most parts of the kingdom. He laboured long and zealously for the Mechanics' Institution, and his efforts in its behalf were in many emergencies extremely successful. His own views were enlarged by a more extended knowledge of the world. He secured the friendship of Ebenezer Elliott, and of many gentlemen of the highest standing in the town. When he resigned his official connexion with the Mechanics' Institution, he was appointed canvasser, and subsequently collector, to the Sheffield New Gas Company. On the amalgamation of the two Gas Companies, his services as collector were found acceptable to the directors of the United Company; and he retained that situation to the day of his death. His literary works, written entirely in the leisure hours of a busy life, consist of a volume of poems, the "Memoirs of Matthias D'Amour," several tales, and miscellaneous essays. During the whole of his residence in Sheffield, he was an occasional correspondent of *The Independent*, and ever took a warm interest in its prosperity. He was skilled in versification, and some of his best effusions in rhyme richly deserve the name of poetry. The bent of his mind, however, was decidedly metaphysical. This is shown in his verse and in his prose; and those who enjoyed the pleasure of his conversation had often reason to remark his readiness to suggest topics

for discussion of an abstruse nature. With better training he might have been distinguished in some of the higher branches of philosophy. As a politician, Mr. Rodgers was favourable to all rational plans of progress. On some points his sentiments bordered on the extremity of Radicalism ; but he was always tolerant of the opinions of others. To do good was his constant aim. His failings sprung from his virtues. He delighted to soothe the afflicted, and to succour the distressed. In all domestic relations he was most kind and affectionate. His means were small, but his spirit was bountiful ; and many were the designs of benevolence that he originated. One of the latest of his labours of love was the attempt, and not without success, to raise funds for the erection of a monument to the memory of his friend Ebenezer Elliott. He lived not for himself but for others. His cordial manner and familiar face will long be missed by the many persons with whom he was necessarily associated ; and his death will be regarded as a public loss. After a severe illness of about twelve days, and with a full knowledge that his end was at hand, Mr. Rodgers peacefully expired last Monday morning, 22nd of September, 1851, in the presence of the principal members of his family. His remains were interred in Greasbrough churchyard on Thursday afternoon.



RECOLLECTIONS

OF

EBENEZER ELLIOTT, HIS FAMILY, AND FRIENDS:

BY PAUL RODGERS.

I KNEW the family of Mr. Ebenezer Elliott from about the second year of the present century. His father, who was also called Ebenezer, kept an ironmonger's shop, then the only one in the town of Rotherham. It was situated at the top of High Street, opposite to the shop now occupied by Mr. Wigfield. As I was a shoemaker's apprentice at Greasbrough I had frequently to visit Mr. Elliott's shop for the purchase of various articles in our line of work.

I recollect old Mr. Elliott very well, for he was a most marked character. In person he was low and squat, with a broad face, as the poet has described him. I know not how it was that he could be so constantly in attendance upon the shop, having the important concerns of the foundry on hand at the same time. Ebenezer, the poet, was then about twenty years of age; and notwithstanding what he says about his own juvenile dulness, I suspect that at that age he was a better man than his father. It is a fact, however, that the old gentleman was the principal shopkeeper. I always liked to have business at his

counter, for I was fond of hearing his quaint remarks, and his pithy Jacobin epigrams and speeches. I was the more pleased, however, when an older person, and one of more consequence, had taken the precedence of me; for I had then to stand and wait, and was certain to hear more of his pithy speeches, and witness more of his strange gesticulations, than I should otherwise have done.

This was during the period when Mr. Pitt was in office, and when the active and daring spirit of Bonaparte was keeping the world in such a state of bustle and excitement. The popularity of the first French Revolution had entirely died away in England, and, in fact, the excesses which the French had run into, first by murdering each other at home, and then by their lust of conquest abroad, had completely turned the English people into the opposite extreme of loyalty. Yeomanry Cavalry, and Volunteers of Infantry, were the great engrossing subjects of the time. In those days a hearty old Jacobin was something rare. I only knew two such of any consequence. One was a Joseph Oxley, of Elscar, who got the nick-name of *Boney*, which he has always since retained, for he is still living in extreme old age, and the other was this same Mr. Elliott.

I have thought since, that old Ebenezer must have been rather fonder of talking, and less prone to condensation, than his son was, or he would never have endured some of the loquacious characters, who, I know, were in the habit of holding conversations with him. One of them, namely, old Godfrey Thompson of Greasbrough, was a particularly long-winded fellow. He would have talked till doomsday. I have frequently seen him in Elliott's shop, and as I recollect, he had not all the talk to himself. As an incident, illustrative of Thompson's talking

propensity, I may mention that he once started to walk from Greasbrough to Wath, a distance of four miles, in company with a neighbour, about some business in which they were jointly interested. They had not proceeded more than two hundred yards from the village, ere they were met by a third party, who engaged Godfrey in his beloved art of talking. The friend proceeded without him, slowly at first, but ultimately with a more average speed. Vainly he continued to look behind him for his companion. Mile after mile passed, till he arrived at Wath. After waiting there sometime, in vain, he proceeded to transact the business himself; which, in time, he did. He then set out on his return, wending his way leisurely along till, having walked eight miles, he arrived at the same field where he left the disputants, and there he still found them in the heat of debate.

One reason why I so well recollect Godfrey Thompson in connexion with the elder Mr. Elliott is, that I was once in the latter gentleman's shop, and saw him give or lend Godfrey a publication of his own, being a poetic, or at least rhymed "Paraphrase of the Book of Job." At that time I was wonderfully struck with the idea of being in the presence of a man who had printed a book. As such, the incident made a lasting impression on me.

As I have spoken of one original character in connexion with the elder Mr. Elliott, I will allude to another, who has been specially distinguished by the poet, in the magazine preface which he published to his poem called "Devil Byron." The character I mean was Luke Adams. Old Luke, whom Mr. Elliott calls "one of God's own," was a forgerman. In figure he was short and thick-set, with an uncommonly swarthy face. His appearance, altogether, gave a mixed idea of fun and importance. Among his own associates he was a very important man,

and being a small literary genius was often appealed to, as a learned authority, by his mates.

I believe all through life, Luke had a lively sense of religion, though he sometimes took singular methods of manifesting it. He was much attached to the Methodists. His call to preach was so powerful, that he needed neither the laying on of hands, nor even a place on the Local Preacher's Plan. He had many acquaintances and associates in the villages round about, and to one of these villages he would go, call on some original in his own line whose house he could occupy for his purpose; send, or go round the neighbourhood to invite the people together, and then hold forth in a most voluble style, making use of words, which neither he nor they understood, to the great wonder of the simple people, and to his own entire satisfaction. At Greasbrough, Luke always held these primitive kinds of preaching at old Polly Sharpe's.

I must not omit to mention that on one occasion Luke was preaching at Brightside, where several of his old pot-companions lived, for he was unfortunately addicted to drinking. One of these, called Gilman, happened to be drinking at a public-house hard by. The toper, knowing Luke's propensity, and feeling for what he considered his unenviable position, took his own tankard of ale in his hand, and with his pipe in his mouth, deliberately walked into the assembly. As the attention of the auditors was turned towards him, the fellow held out the pot, saying, "Luke, lad, take hold and drink, thou must be very dry." Taking the invitation as it was meant, kindly, Luke drank off the ale, and then resumed the discourse.

Mr. Mark Gregory, an old workman of Elliott's, gave me another edition of the story, namely, that Luke did not actually drink, but merely suspended his discourse a

moment, waived his hand to his friend, and said in an under tone, "take your time, Gilman, I'll be with thee soon."

Luke's fondness for drink was very strong, and very unfortunate. His great house of call in Rotherham was the Red Bear, in Bridge Gate. It is related of him, that in one of his remorseful moods, having resolved to be heroically virtuous, he actually got quite past the Red Bear without calling. He had not proceeded more than fifty yards, however, chuckling in self-esteem over his victory, when his usual strong desire attacked him again, and he audibly resolved that he would give so deserving a resolution a special treat, and he actually turned back for the purpose.

But Luke was also a literary genius. To give an instance of his readiness at literary criticism: One of his fellow-workmen, namely, John Martin, was a religious man. I knew John; he was a reader in a certain line. Having met, one day, with the word *oblivion*, and not understanding its meaning, he solicited the necessary information from Luke Adams as follows: "Luke," says he, "what does ob-li-vi-on mean?" Luke confounding, I believe, the word as pronounced, with the word Apollyon, in the Book of Revelation, but, never wishing to be thought wanting in a difficulty, though generally as much in the dark as his querists, promptly answered, (not without a tone of scorn at the man's confessed ignorance,) "what does ob-li-vi-on mean? the Devil, to be sure." Notwithstanding, Luke Adams was a character; and it was to Mr. Elliott's honour that he knew and appreciated what was good in him.

John Woffenden, the Greasbrough boat-builder,* whom

* Mr. Rodgers alludes here to the fact that Elliott, when a boy, having built and rigged a sort of model ship, presented it to Woffenden, who, in his turn, presented it to Lord Fitzwilliam, as

Mr. Elliott names in connexion with Earl Fitzwilliam, affords another illustration of the same sort. I knew him very well. He brought a large family from Thorne to Greasbrough, about 1796, and commenced a boat-building establishment by the canal side. He was a mere working man; how he raised the means to commence business I cannot tell. He was a remarkable instance of honest persevering industry, combined with many humorous and jovial characteristics. Though the sound of the boat-builder's hammer has long since ceased, and though the canal itself has disappeared, John's son, John, still lives in the same house, highly respected. Elliott found out old John Woffenden in some of his fishing rambles, which he was fond of taking up the Greasbrough canal. If I mistake not, my own personal knowledge of the poet originated while pursuing the same art, in the same locality. I should then be about ten or twelve years old. He would be eighteen or nineteen.

Mr. Elliott had a younger brother, named Edward, who attended a school at Greasbrough, during part of the time that I was serving my apprenticeship there. As our shop was near the school, and as we occasionally worked for the family, this Edward used frequently to spend his hour of noon with me in the shop. To show how Ebenezer was regarded at home, I may name, that this boy always spoke of him in more affectionate terms than he did of the rest. If he had to mention anything which had occurred at home, of a pleasing character, *Ebby* was sure to have been the hero of the

a sample of what he (Woffenden) could do in the boat-building line! His lordship was so pleased with it, that he made Woffenden his boat-builder; and Elliott relates this very questionable circumstance, with a little dash of triumph, in his autobiography.

circumstance. This trifling evidence does not justify Ebenezer's idea of his own dulness.

My next recollections of Ebenezer Elliott are those of frequently meeting him when newly married, with his young wife by his side, on the Sunday morning, on the Greasbrough road, as I went to Masbrough chapel. Sometimes he would be alone, and either musing aloud, or occupied in evident but silent contemplation. Those who have only known him during his later years, can have no conception of the perfectly erect gait, and stylish dress and air which he then manifested.

Mr. Elliott, like his father, always knew the value of money, and the difficulty of getting and keeping it. Notwithstanding, he failed in business. While Ebenezer and Giles were yet young men, Ebenezer, by arrangement, took to the entire business of the foundry. The father had the shop to himself; and Giles commenced a similar ironmongery concern at Doncaster. Poor Giles, who had early contracted intemperate habits, soon blighted his own prospects. This unfortunate propensity, with its consequences, was a source of great grief to the family, and, perhaps, most of all to the fond and sensitive heart of his brother, the poet. Meantime, Ebenezer found that a large payment which he had agreed to make to his father and brother on their separation from him, was more than he should ever have undertaken, and its consequences more than he could long contend against. He gradually sunk, and became, I believe, a perfect specimen of an honest bankrupt. Poor Ebenezer! His heart was long and sorely rent; nor had he then the consolation of knowing how Providence was preparing him to be the consoler of thousands who should be fixed in similar circumstances.

The first indication which I received of Mr. Elliott's

poetic character, was from *The Iris* newspaper. I have little notion of the date of the circumstance, but it is a great many years ago. Mr. Montgomery was then editor of *The Iris*. Some poetry appeared in the corner of the paper usually appropriated to it, headed "Night," and introduced by the editor in words like these:—"The following lines are from a beautiful, but unpublished poem, called 'Wharnccliffe,' by Mr. Ebenezer Elliott, of Rotherham." The lines were the concluding paragraph of the above-named poem; and they now stand on the seventeenth page of Tait's edition of Elliott's Poetical Works.

Without any knowledge of particulars, but rather judging from incidental remarks and allusions which I have frequently heard him make, I believe that after his unfortunate failure, Mr. Elliott had to struggle hard for a considerable time under its consequences. At last he received essential help in an extraordinary way. His name, as a writer, was becoming known, if not to the world, at least, among a circle of literary men; and the late truly-generous Earl Fitzwilliam being aware of his difficulties and his merits, voluntarily remitted to him a considerable present. This, I have heard the poet say, saved him from final ruin.

It was after Mr. Elliott had been several years in Sheffield, that my attention was called to one of his earliest published volumes, containing, among other poems, "The Village Patriarch." The man who showed it to me was Mr. Samuel Crooks, Bookseller, then of Rotherham, now of Chester; and because he knew I could not afford to buy it, he kindly (after pointing out some of its beauties) lent it me out of his shop, that I might have an opportunity of reading it.

Soon after the date of the last-named circumstance, Mr. Elliott's name had become far better known. A

small local publication called "The Wath Magazine," to which I had contributed, introduced me to Mr. Larett Langley, of Brampton, who was its principal editor; of him I borrowed a thin volume, consisting chiefly of Elliott's short and striking poems, called "Corn Law Rhymes." Mr. Langley was an excellent critic of language, as well as a judge of general literature; and he gave me a deep impression of Elliott's composition, independently of his political views and feelings. This, together with my previous knowledge, both of the man and his works, caused me to take the volume home from Brampton, with the expectation of receiving a rich treat, and I was not disappointed. I read the poems over, one after another, first to myself, and then to my wife and children. As the subjects were chiefly suffering poverty, of which we had been, and still were, large partakers, they suited us amazingly. We sympathized with the poet, even tearfully, because he sympathized with us. An honest-hearted old collier, worn out with a life of hard work, and who was then a pauper, and frequented my little shop as a place for pastime, wept again and again, as I read the passages to him. In fact, though some of Ebenezer's strong expressions at first rather shocked my religious prejudices, I was not long before I venerated his character, as I should have venerated an old inspired Hebrew prophet.

I am not aware that I had hitherto been personally known to Mr. Elliott. Soon after I removed to Sheffield, which was in January, 1833, I saw him for the first time after many years. He was walking up Barker Pool, towards his own house, and I was walking behind him. Instead of the straight and upright figure which I had still retained in the eye of my memory, I was amazed to see a bent and time-worn man. I wished much to speak

and make myself known to him, but could not find a pretext to do it at that time. Subsequently, I having published some lines in *The Sheffield Iris*, which had the good luck to be slightly admired, and having had a few copies of them struck off for private circulation, my friend, Dr. G. C. Holland, persuaded me to call on Elliott, and present one to him, together with his (Dr. Holland's) compliments. I did so, and was received with extreme courtesy. As to my verses, I know not what extravagant things he said about them. I recollect he ended by telling me, that I had thrown both Montgomery and himself into the shade!* Of course I was not so foolish as to swallow this nonsense, literally; yet, I confess, I was not only much pleased with his kind reception, but a good deal intoxicated with the praise. What poor scribbler could have been otherwise? I soon learned to value Mr. Elliott's off-hand flattery more at its real value. Yet this injudicious way of buoying people up, I always thought one of the irreconcilable things in my friend's conduct. It is true, after one knew him better, there was a way of getting at his

* This was a grave fault of Elliott's. He praised young authors so indiscriminately, that he did immense mischief; and often encouraged talents which would have been more profitably employed in blacking shoes than in soiling paper with bad rhymes. I once remonstrated with him for persisting in this injurious habit, and his answer was: "I do not like to give pain. Writing will do these poor devils no harm, but good, and save them from worse things." My reply was: "But your criticisms are not just, if they were, they would be serviceable." "But," he said, "these scribblers don't want justice, but praise; and if my praise can do them any good, they are welcome to it." This was bad enough, and I think unpardonable. Yet Elliott was a true eritie when he pleased to be so, "but not to fools," as he emphatically said.

J. S.

real opinions; but the enquirer must be himself capable of reasoning, and of putting this and that together. It is but justice to say, that I had afterwards many proofs of honest criticism from him, which, by-the-by, were not so pleasant, if more useful.

From that day—I say it with gratitude, as well as pride—Mr. Elliott was my friend. One thing which helped to keep up and increase our intercourse, was the circumstance, that while I was the assistant-secretary of the Mechanics' Institution, he was, at the same time, a member of its committee. I had not been very long known to him, before I gave him to understand that I had formed some excellent acquaintances among the members and managers of the Institution, one of whom, particularly, I should much like him to know. When I mentioned the name, I was glad and surprised to learn that he already knew and appreciated him. Those who know anything of me and my associates will scarcely need informing that the individual meant was my still highly-esteemed friend, Mr. John Fowler. Mr. Elliott immediately gave a hearty invitation to his house for any or all of us. This was the origin and commencement of many pleasant meetings and excursions, and of at least sixteen years of varied but always satisfactory intercourse between the poet, myself, and four or five others.

With regard to myself, I will diverge from my subject so much as to say, that I had now, as far as interesting associates went, satisfied a craving which I had long experienced. For many previous years I had vainly sighed for congenial society. As for literary genius, I had once been greatly pleased to walk sixteen miles to look upon and listen to James Montgomery. Now, I was an honoured member of a voluntary and select band, any of which were capable of literary appreciation, and

exercise too, and numbering one of almost world-wide fame. I can look back to the time to which I am alluding, and see how crude many of my own notions were, and how vaguely my principles were jumbled together. Having led more than twenty years of my previous life as a conventionally religious man, but having recently had my orthodoxy shaken by reading and study, I was just then a curious medley of doubt, conjecture, and speculation. My naturally strong religious feelings had given way, and I was bewildered, something like a certain personage in his celebrated journey through chaos; first, I was lifted up by some ideal "nitrous cloud" into the third heaven of speculation; and, anon, dropping into a "boggy syrtis" of despair. In this condition, I am not aware that I could have met with a more efficient help than Mr. Elliott proved to be. Whatever the world may say to the contrary, he was a deeply religious man; and when deep feeling comes to be appreciated as a better test than mere profession of belief, religion like his will not then be questioned.

In one of the letters which I had the pleasure of receiving from him, Mr. Elliott states, that nearly all his poems originated in real circumstances. I had conjectured that such was the case, before he told me. "The Jacobin's Prayer," I think, is no doubt made up of curses and singularly-expressed wishes which he had heard over and over from his own father. The backing of

"His war-horse through the panes
Of quiet people who had brains,"

was an incident in the old man's history; and the cursings, after the fashion of David, King of Israel, are no less genuine remembrancers, to all who knew anything of old Ebenezer, the Ironmonger.

Those who did not personally know Mr. Elliott, will, of course, have learned from his writings how much the iniquity of the corn and provision-restricting laws were hated and condemned by him. But such persons cannot be fully aware of the extent of his feeling, and the occasional frenzy of his excited powers, when the subject was introduced in conversation. One of the individuals whom I alluded to as belonging to our literary and social circle, was the late lamented Mr. Francis Fisher. This amiable young gentleman, though not then in the regular ministry, was in the habit of preaching at Stannington, and various places, in connexion with the Unitarians. Of all benevolent, truth-loving individuals, I never knew his superior. Mr. Elliott thought equally highly of him. Though extremely modest, Mr. F. was fond of preaching, and of talking about his sermons, and Mr. Elliott had invited him to read one of them to a few of us, at his house, at Upperthorpe, one Sunday afternoon. After the sermon, which was a real good one, and while the party were engaged in conversation, it happened that Mr. Fisher, who did not think exactly with Mr. Elliott on the subject, by some allusion or other, introduced his view of the Corn Laws. I shall never forget the scene which followed. It was tremendous. He had evidently allowed his mind to get over-balanced by strong and long continued excitement. Half an hour, however, set all right again; the poet was as gentle as a lamb.

In conversation, Mr. Elliott was what a reader of his works would have expected him to be. No one who has studied his poems would imagine that he was a loquacious person. He thought too well, and selected his language with too much care, to be always talking. Perhaps, in the art of condensation, he never had his equal. It is certain, that in this power he even sur-

passed Burns. It will be easy to conceive, that to such a thinker, and to such a master of language, mere talk would be very annoying.

Perhaps it was owing to his systematic mode of thinking and speaking, that one often got a glimpse of what he was contemplating in his study, even before he formally announced it. While the thoughts which were intended to live were becoming clothed in language whose beauty would stereotype it, he not unfrequently allowed the newly-coined ideas and phrases to emanate beforehand. I have frequently been struck while reading his last published piece, to find one or other of its most striking passages already tingling, as it were, in the ear of my memory, from their repetition in recent conversations. If I am right on this subject, and I think I am, it not only shows how rich he was in material for thought, but how carefully he husbanded that material, and how economical even genius sometimes is.

The first appearance of the late Charles Reece Pemberton in Sheffield, was an event which influenced Elliott both immediately and in its consequences. Pemberton had previously written the *Pel Verquice Papers*, and other things which had raised his name high in the esteem of an influential class of literary men. One of his first enquiries, on reaching the town, by the hills of Norton, was for the Mechanics' Institution. His next was for Ebenezer Elliott. I believe their first meeting was at Mr. Elliott's warehouse. Such persons needed no introduction. They had been acquainted before they met; and, if a personal recognition, increased their mutual attachment, it no more altered its nature than it originated the feeling. Mr. Elliott hailed with increased delight every subsequent visit of the distinguished dramatist. During Pemberton's long and painful illness

Elliott cheerfully joined Sergeant Talfourd, W. J. Fox, Dr. Holland, and many other sympathising friends in their efforts to promote his relief and recovery.

How Pemberton's death affected Mr. Elliott all his friends know who have read his touching and beautiful lines, entitled "Poor Charles." I have often thought how highly and appropriately honoured the memory of Pemberton was, in Finsbury Square Chapel, on that Sunday morning when those lines were sung to music, composed for the occasion by the sweetly-gifted, now deceased, Miss Flower. I will here quote the verses:—

POOR CHARLES.

"SHUNN'D by the rich, the vain, the dull,

Truth's all-forgiving son,

The gentlest of the beautiful,

His painful course hath run ;

Content to live, to die resign'd ;

In meekness, prond of wishes kind,

And duties nobly done.

A godlike child hath left the earth ;

In heaven a child is born :

Cold world ! thou could'st not know his worth,

And well he earned thy scorn ;

For he believed that all may be

What martyrs are, in spite of thee,

Nor wear thy crown of thorn.

Smiling, he wreathed it round his brain,

And dared what martyrs dare ;

For God, who wastes not joy nor pain,

Had armed his soul to bear :

But vain his hope to find below

That peace which heaven alone can know ;

He diel, to seek it there."

Poor Charles, indeed! Elliott long mourned his distressing illness and his painful wanderings. If, however, his spirit could feel a sense of recompense in heaven, for his earthly sufferings, it must have been in looking down and witnessing such a trio of geniuses as Elliott, Fox, and Flower, surrounded, perhaps, by the most intellectual Christian congregation in the world, all conspiring to honour his memory.

At the time when the "Working-men's Associations" were first formed, for the improvement and subsequent enfranchisement of the working classes, Mr. Elliott, like the rest of us, joined in the project, heart and soul. He wrote for us, spoke at public meetings, joined our subscriptions, and laid himself out in every possible way to advance the cause of the people. While such men as William Lovett guided the movement, nothing was wanting on Elliott's part. As soon, however, as the demagogues got the upper hand, and physical-force became the order of the day, Elliott knew better than to allow his name to remain attached to such a debased and ruined cause. He withdrew, like many more, in utter disgust.

It is a fact that will perhaps astonish some people, to know that Elliott, as a writer, is very little known, and poorly appreciated, in Sheffield. Had he not been a politician, and sometimes a public speaker, thousands of his townsmen would never have known him at all. One apology may be made for this apparent apathy, namely, the prodigious condensation, and consequent frequent incomprehensibility of his style. This is peculiarly applicable to many of his political epigrams, and such short pieces as often appeared in the newspapers. I need not say to such as have read him thoroughly, that he sometimes wrote as effectively to

the plainest understanding, and as touchingly to the most rustic heart of nature's true child, as either Scott, Burns, or Shakspeare. But this was far from being always the case. From experience, I can say that the common understanding frequently failed to comprehend him at the first sight. Many were the occasions on which I laid down the newspaper or magazine, resolving that, at last, Ebenezer had written something which I could not understand, and of course, could not like. I scarcely need add, that in every instance, I found the fault was in my own dulness, and that the persevering intellect was always rewarded. Many of his readers, however, wanted the interest which I felt; they merely wondered what he aimed at, and laid aside the paper. Though every one acknowledged his merit, it is with him as it has often been with others—popular opinion follows that of acknowledged literary authority. Popular opinion would raise a monument to Elliott; but more because his name is in every newspaper, than because the populace have read, understood, and appreciated him. It is true, it was very different, if the lines coming under observation were such as "Hannah Radcliffe," "The Home of Taste," "The Dying Boy to the Sloe Blossom," and other pieces of a similar popular character.

The above was one reason why Elliott was not universally appreciated; but there were others. A man who does not support conventional interests, but rather takes every opportunity of opposing selfish and oppressive authority, is sure to make himself many enemies. And the greater the power he brings to bear against the evils, the more he will be slandered and persecuted. It will be easily seen, that his energetic zeal manifested against the Corn Laws, would cause his name to be hated by a large and influential class. But neither was this the last

reason. Ebenezer Elliott was not religiously orthodox. It would not have signified much had he been a mere *practical atheist*; that is, if he had forgotten that there is a God in heaven; if he had overlooked the oppressed and the oppressors on earth. He might have done all this, and have been one of the boon associates of these professedly orthodox Christians; but he could not let tyranny and hypocrisy alone. Like an inspired bard, as he was, he told the tyrants the truth, and they hated him, and called him *an infidel*! Shame on the calumniators! If ever a Christian heart beat in a human bosom, it was in that of the Corn Law Rhymer. It will never be forgotten, that when Ebenezer Elliott, in the year 1839, simply sought admission to the Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society, *the members of that society black-balled him*!

As a member of the Mechanics' Institution Committee, Mr. Elliott constantly exerted himself, energetically and effectively, for its welfare. His course of Lectures on "Poets and Poetry," part of which were published in "Tait's Magazine," were written for and delivered to the Mechanics' Institution at our request. For a considerable period he devoted much of his time in waiting on manufacturers and neighbouring gentlemen, on behalf of the fund for the erection of the building in Surrey Street. Nor did he withhold his money. Besides his name being in the highest list of annual subscribers, he gave several special donations.

The circumstances which led to Mr. Elliott's removal, with his family, from Sheffield to the neighbourhood of Great Houghton, as they were related by himself, deserve recording. I think it was in the ante-room of the Commercial News-room, High Street, that he gave me the following account. "Many years ago," he said, "while

he was waiting to transact some business at an office in East Parade, Sheffield, being seated with his eye towards the churchyard, he observed a dog gnawing a human bone which had been flung from a new-made grave. Being nervously sensitive on such subjects, he turned away with the greatest disgust, and was for some time agitated distressingly. He immediately determined that if ever he became able, he would purchase at least as much land as would afford himself a quiet grave."

He next went on to tell me, "that a few days ago he had gone down to Rotherham, for the purpose of transacting some business with Mr. Benjamin Badger, auctioneer. When he got to Rotherham, Mr. Badger happened to be in his auction-room, attempting to sell a few acres of land, which he described as lying on the edge of Houghton Common. For a short time he (Mr. Elliott) walked about outside the room; presently some one spoke to him of what was going on within, and of what an excellent bargain a person might make who had the means and the inclination. His old determination to become a freeholder came into his mind. He stepped in, and, if I mistake not, Mr. Badger personally addressed him on the unmistakable chance of a cheap pennyworth. The land was described as to situation, extent, what part was arable, what was covered with a small wood, etc. Mr. Elliott concluded to make a bid. He did so, and suddenly became possessed of a land estate." At the time he related these circumstances, he had been over to look at the property, and was still evidently pleased with his bargain; talked of making a good deal of the purchase-money, by clearing the land of wood, and of the probability of his building himself a house, and going to live upon it; all which, time and his own energies brought to pass.

To show that his idea of a rural and private grave was

a serious desire of his mind, I may mention that he once wrote a most feeling letter to Mr. Fowler and myself, wherein he manifested an earnest wish that if it was possible his remains might be buried under a certain tree on the top of Shirecliffe. For our guidance, he had marked the tree by driving a nail into it. Under this tree, he told us, and around it, was the ideal scene of the Sunday morning preaching of Miles Gordon, the Ranter. And a glorious scene it is truly; the most interesting, perhaps, of any around Sheffield. Nearly every hill, and wood, and spire, and monument, which he enumerates in the poem so beautifully, are not only to be seen, but, with their picturesque associations, fully justify his glorious description.

I have often thought, while reading this poem or thinking about it, that had Ebenezer Elliott been somewhat differently educated, he might himself have made the very prototype of Miles Gordon. Had his strong religious feeling only been guided in a more orthodox channel, that same feeling, combined with his great benevolence and firmness of character, would have fitted him for any work of love and self-denial. Respecting his wish to be buried beneath the Gospel Tree, who can blame him, after considering how interestingly dear his musings must have made the scene to his own heart? How such a project was ever to be accomplished, without the concurrence of the members of his own family, was another thing; we never enquired, however; concluding that not to oppose him peremptorily, but to let the matter die away out of his mind, by means of time and other circumstances, would be the best policy.

I recollect that a little while before he left Sheffield I made a kind of casual and slight request to Mr. Elliott, that he would sometime give the particular list of friends

amongst whom I ranked myself, and whom he had so long distinguished by a degree of attachment, the further honour of being knit together by means of a few verses of his valued rhymes. It is unnecessary to acknowledge, on my part, a degree of vanity in this request. I hope, however, it will be deemed pardonable. My veneration for a real poet has been profound, ever since I became acquainted with the writings of Cowper, Goldsmith, Young, and Montgomery, in my youthful days. Whether Mr. Elliott again thought of my request, or whether it went out of his mind, and the idea originated some other way, I know not; but after he had resided awhile at Houghton, having occasion to write to one of our party, namely, Mr. Michael Beale, watchmaker, about a new watch which he was thinking of purchasing, he took occasion to accompany his letter on business by the following copy of singular verses.* The piece has never been published:—

THE WORLD'S BEST.

“SAID the world's best of men (to the knowing, known well
As a fish that could swim with the stream)
Let us sing to the glory and praise of oursel'
My ninety-ninth hymn on that theme.

* I hope the reader will pardon me for inserting these questionable verses. They are however so highly characteristic of Elliott, in his free moods, and possess such real merit, and, what is singular, *humour*, also, that I felt I could not omit them without manifest injustice. Effusions of a similar nature will be found amongst the poems of Burns, and I must plead this precedent in my own justification in the present matter.

I cannot conceive how a wise man, (can you?)
 Could differ from me and do well;
 For my god, Prudence hight, is a god well to do,
Alias, Marry Tak' Care o' Mysel.

The best of all maxims is "Keep what you've got"
 Says Marry Tak' Care o' Mysel;
 So I keep to myself what I know, and know not,
 Or they who know nothing, would tell.

While my tongue is as close as my fist, taking care
 That I seem to know more than is known,
 Who suspects that my treasures, pick'd up here and there,
 Are bits of flos silk and stain'd bone?

God curse that John Fowler, and cobbling old Paul!
 They would teach beggar's boys to know more
 Than your deep gifted men, who know nothing at all
 About Freedom, and such beggar's lore.

My servant mate, Kit, turns her nose up at me!
 The tinner's blear'd lad as I pass
 Cries, "Who'll buy a bag of sloc-leaves for bohea?
 Here's the elephant goose, in an ass!"

The Devil take Fisher and Lowe, with their zeal
 For the love of the lovely and true!
 And burn in his pit, Spencer Hall, and Mic' Beale!
 What have I with their rambles to do?

Yet I'm blamed by Hell-thunder the parson, who sees
 That e'en Kitty comes seldom to pray:
 I'd have her devout, as my mare's broken knees,
 Why is she not, d—n her? I say.

I ask'd her last night, "Why in duty so slack?"
 "He calls us base scum!" she replied;
 But we're good as his master, and not quite so black,
 And we don't curse the chaise, if we ride.

Now, God in his mercy, confound squinting Sam,
 For lending her "Nature Revealed!" *
 But they'd both be religious, as I myself am,
 Were I king while two backs could be peeled.

For they're both gone astray from the fold to the den ;
 From the saints and salvation they're flown ;
 From Wesley and Heaven, to the chapel of men,
 Where the Devil is preached by his own."

Although Elliott was deficient of the humour necessary to create a "Sir John Falstaff," or even a "Tam o'Shanter," he was by no means without humour, as the above, as well as several of his publications prove. It never was matter of surprise to me that he thought he possessed more of it than he really did ; for I have known many instances of self-deception on this very point. That he thought he had humour, the following extract from one of his letters will show. After finding fault with one of my rhymed epistles, for want of humour, he says :—

"I intend to 'shame the fools' who say I have no humour, by transcribing the 'Gipsy,' and sending it to John Fowler for his opinion.† But once again, and once for all, I disclaim all personal allusion in that poem.‡ Like most of my poems, it is a result of observation, and not more personal than the least personal of them all."

* "Nature, a Revelation."

† He had a high and just opinion of Mr. Fowler's judgment. But though he sent the poem as proposed, and promptly received a full acknowledgment of many of its peculiar beauties, he was not, I believe, gratified with an unqualified confirmation of his own opinion.

‡ I had previously intimated that the poem contained personal allusions.

On the subject of humour I shall be excused in transcribing part of another letter, as no mean proof that he was not entirely without it. I had sent him a printed copy of an account of a pleasure excursion among the hills and dales of Derbyshire. The passage may not suit every one, but we shall never all think alike; and Elliott, I am sure, would have been the last to make light of what he conscientiously deemed sacred subjects. Here is Elliott's letter:—

“Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 14th Oct., 1846.

“DEAR MR. RODGERS,

“I wronged all the souls in my carease, (if any are left,) when I thought I was forgotten even of Paul.

“Thanks for your ‘Days in the Dales,’ and—

“When next you mount your one-horse chay,
May I ride with you all the way.

* * * *

“Railway trips to the moors not being yet the fashion, and economy being, of course, an object with all poets, I suggest an improvement on the one-horse chaise. As Sheffield poets (unless they are altered) sometimes travel on the Sabbath, I think we might prevail on a certain personage, who shall be nameless, to constitute his back our locomotive, when next we go a picturesquing. We might hold on by his tail; taking care to grease it first, that we might slip him at his hall door,* if he took it into his head to carry us further than we bargained for. Ask Fowler what he thinks of this plan?

“EBENEZER, C.L.R.”

As a writer and public speaker Mr. Elliott was truly no respecter of persons. Although their well-known champion and defender on most occasions, when he saw the people in the wrong, as he frequently did, he no more flattered them than the rest. It is well recollected in

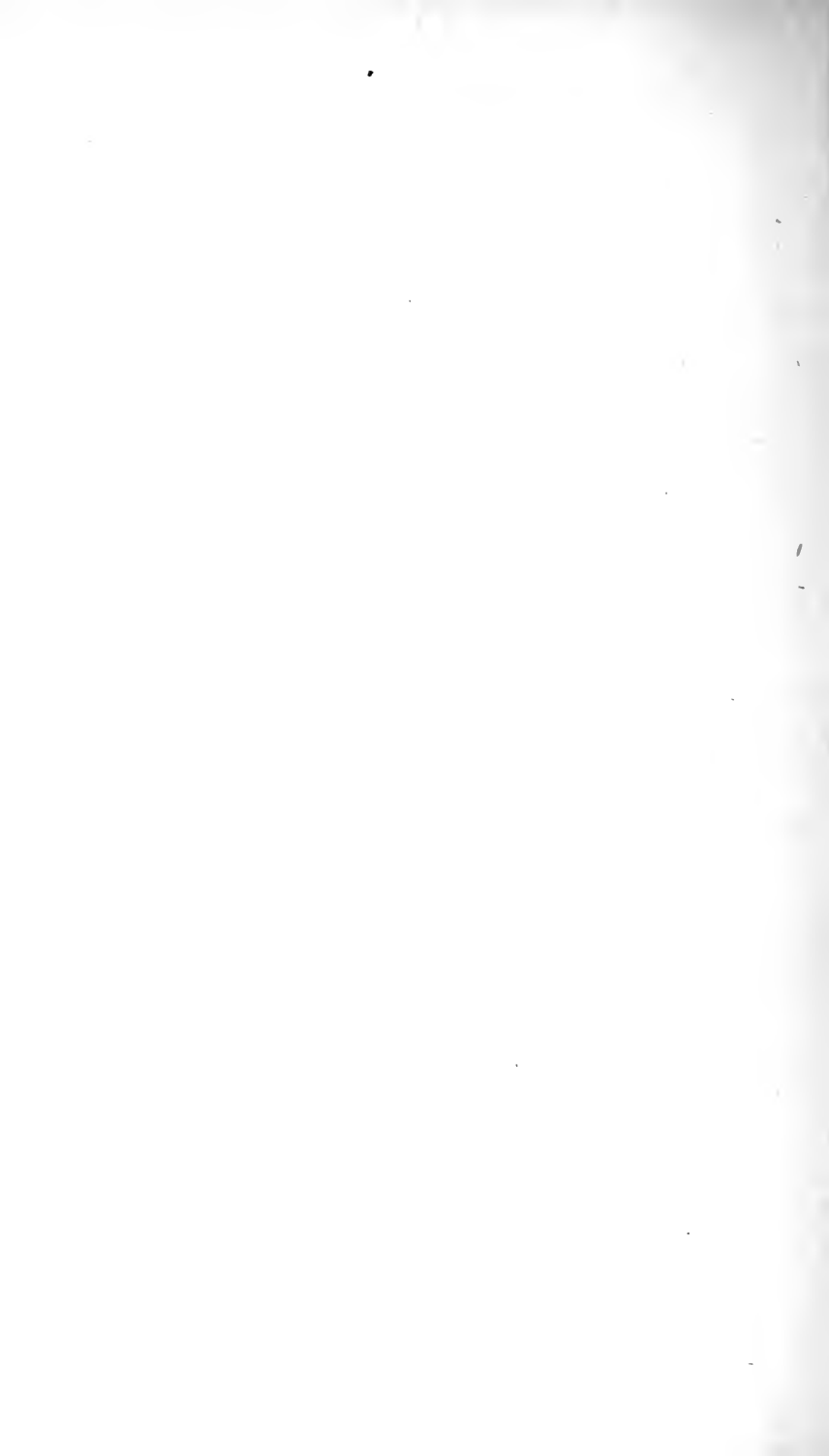
* The Peak Cavern, at Castleton, called by the vulgar “The Devil's Hole,” “The Devil's House of the Peak,” etc.

Sheffield how indignantly he hurled his ire against the physical-force Chartists. The Socialists, too, had little mercy at his hands. Two or three of the latter sect were well known to him. On a subject, however, of such vital importance to the interests of society, no associations of friendship, or worldly consideration, blinded him to the truth, or prevented him from uttering its dictates.

Mr. Elliott's judgment on public matters and questions of business I always thought varied a good deal. I know not whether it was that he did not, in every case, bring the whole of his powers to bear on the subject before him, or how it was, but while his perception and decision seemed now and then faulty, generally and most especially on points of importance, his judgment was clear and his mind foreseeing. Perhaps he was sometimes warped by prejudice. I think it is clear that he was so on subjects connected with the conduct of the aristocracy. He had contemplated their occasional baseness, till he suspected them in everything. On the subject which he studied well he almost always decided right. Being very attentive to his business, I believe he seldom committed business errors.

With regard to Mr. Elliott's frame and figure, he has been sorely handled by the painters and engravers. Those who never knew him ought to be told, that the published portraits convey scarcely any idea at all of the man. The one in Tait's copy is a mere scare-crow. On the first publication of the volume, he kindly sent several copies as presentations among his friends. I recollect he told me in a note accompanying mine, that he "had touched the portrait up a little." And so he had, with a strong hand, for he had made the eye-brows and hair stand staring out like the prickles on a hedgehog. I should not now, however, be soon induced to

part with the valued relic. The portrait of him by Margaret Gillies, in "Howitt's Journal," may be a better picture, but is still less like him. It is amusing to read Mr. Howitt's congratulatory remarks upon it. He says: "Here he sits, in his own proper likeness, as he sat on that pleasant Sunday morning in January last." Mr. Howitt thought so, or he would not have said it; but "God forbid," say Elliott's friends, "that such a common looking thing should be taken for anything resembling Ebenezer Elliott." Among the engraved portraits, the one which conveys the best impression of him, is that in the first volume of his works, published in 1833. Mr. Elliott's head was not large; and he often said, that supposing it true that he had something in it, its want of size belied phrenology. His frame was energetic and wiry, more remarkable for nerve than sinew. In youth, as I have said before, he was singularly upright, like a little man who did not wish to lose a hair's-breadth of height. As age came on, he became a little bent, a good deal bleached, and wrinkled; and altogether carrying the appearance of a weather-beaten, care-worn man. The last time I had the pleasure of seeing him, was the day on which he planted a tree, by request, in our Botanical Gardens.



CORRESPONDENCE.



CORRESPONDENCE.

THE following characteristic letters were addressed to Mr. George Tweddell, editor of "The Yorkshire Miscellany."

*"Great Houghton Common, near Barnsley,
13th August, 1844.*

"DEAR SIR,

"I feel honoured by the receipt of a letter from such a man as George Tweddell. But it grieves me to say that I have no unpublished non-political poem, except one which is 300 lines too long for any magazine, and having been written as an experiment to combine the humorous and the beautiful, by a writer destitute of humour, is, of course, a failure. I will send you something soon, if I can bring my drape of a muse to her milk again. But what can you expect from an old bitch past bearing? I set her to work for you last night, and she conceived and brought forth certain glimmerings of moonshine, but of such a red, ferrety, anti-corn-law hue, that I put them into the fire, without at all weakening the flame. She is like the painter who could paint nothing but red lions; if she tries to paint angels, it is plain at a glance that they come of red lions, let the lady say what she will. Perhaps the truth is, that I am humbled by the excellence of the poetry in your magazine. Who is Sylvan? I have long suspected that I am nobody in such company. The author of 'The Island of Demons,' gone to the Capulets, was assuredly somebody.

'Why should futurity give me or thee hopes,
When not a pinch of dust is left of Cheopes?'

Could we persuade some other great folks to suspect that they are not gods, but mortals of the useless species, our bread-taxers would be much wiser and happier devils than they are.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

"I am unwilling to depress you, yet I must in honesty say, that you cannot succeed without a miracle, and miracles are no longer wrought, except for the strong. No town out of London, (Edinburgh excepted) has been able to support a magazine; not Manchester, nor Liverpool; it is whispered, not Dublin, though, like Edinburgh, a metropolis.

"E. E."

"Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 8th Jan., 1845.

"DEAR SIR,

"If I have not sent you a contribution, it is because I have not been able to write one likely to be of service to you. The only things I have sent to the press during the last three years are failures, extreme in their politics. Indeed, I did not leave Sheffield before my energies had left me. I need no bookseller, and have none, for the only book I buy is a weekly newspaper at second hand. But that I have read a few articles in the Westminster Review, I might say that I am newspaper taught, and after passing a very active life, I cannot read without being ill. I am sorry you blame the people for not helping you: famine is helping hundreds of thousands of them into the grave, and the survivors will be more to be pitied than the dead. * * I have tried in vain to obtain a subscriber or two for you. I live surrounded by several hundred acres of wood, nine miles from the nearest market town, with three neighbours in the circuit of a mile, reading no book but Old Moore. With Roseberry—with the whole district of Hambleton, Helmsley, Guisbrough, Rosedale, Eskdale,—I am much better acquainted than I dare try to be with these police-haunted woods, and farmsteads tenanted by unliveried dependents of palaced paupers. Alter or omit the lines in your poem which refer to your detractors. Why stand on your defence without occasion? Live them down, or die them down.

"I am, dear Sir, yours truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"Great Houghton, 25th Feb., 1845.

"DEAR SIR,

"I thank you for your favour of the 20th instant, and gladly subscribe for your friend's 'Songs of the Heart,' heartily

wishing him success, though the days of verse are numbered. My Sonnet on the Dearne is utterly worthless. In 'Tait' there are one or two good ones of mine, addressed to our friend Thomas Lister. You will find him in many respects remarkable—a courageous, energetic, gristle-bodied man, with a bump of 'I'll have my own way,' bigger than a hen's egg, on his summit-ridge; his face is handsome, except the eyes, or rather their position, which is cavernous; the eyes themselves are keen and characteristic; his lips are beautiful. If there is truth in phrenology, his observant faculties should be strong and active, as his writings seem to prove. If I had known such a man forty years earlier, I could have climbed Ben Lomond with him, for, with the assistance of my hands, I could then have sprung over such a man. But well-a-day!

'My hair is grey, my blood is cold,
The minstrel is infirm and old.'

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

"I shall be glad to see you in my den, but home-brewed I have none. When I married 'Ar Mester,' she agreed that she would have two bairns, a lad and a lass, and the best home-brewed ale in England. She more than kept her promise as to the bairns, for they came so fast that they stopped the brewing."

The six subsequent letters, addressed to Mr. Isaac Ironside, the leading Socialist of Sheffield, and for a long time Elliott's friend and business agent, will show how determined was the hatred with which Elliott regarded the communistic ideas and communism. I will insert them according to their dates.

"*Sheffield, 10th March, 1834.*

"SIR,

"My son Ben advises me to have nothing to do with your meeting. Why, he asks, should it be called? If your object is to prove me wrong and Owen right, why did you not do so long since, before all England? Instead of doing so, what have you done? You have used the worst fallacies, and the worst language,

of your worst enemies, the Tories, for the purpose of bullying a man whom you cannot refute, and whom you would not attempt to bully, if you were not dupes. And who are now your allies? The Patrons of Blackwood—the bread-tax-eaters themselves! ‘Why,’ my son asks, ‘should Ebenezer Elliott encourage a set of hulking idlers to come here with the money of the Charles Street Gang under their tongues, and an endless farrago of abuse and commonplace plausibilities at the end of them, all got by rote?’ Is it worth a public meeting to give certain geese an opportunity of crowing like cocks, if a man, who so far from being a public speaker, despises both the babble and the babblers, should not be able, or willing, to outgabble half a dozen deluded fools, and perhaps half a dozen vile hirelings beside? Hirelings? Yes. You say your parent society has now plenty of money. Whence comes it? If you are sold, who bought you? Where are the accounts? I don’t like mystery. My conduct in your society has been straightforward and undisguised, and you have suffered it to be misrepresented. But my opinions are before the public. And your barrister—the greatest goose of Manchester and Salford—has taken good care not to re-publish them. As to your plan of what you call Regeneration, the more impracticable it is the better, provided you *act* upon it, instead of *talking* about it. In all the circumstances—a late motion in the Commons on the Corn Laws included—perhaps you cannot do better for all England than follow the advice of Owen and Fielding. Do so, in sufficient numbers, and the bread-tax-eaters, whose dupes you are, will awake with a start! There will be no occasion then to ask either you or them to rid the Corn Laws; they will then be got rid of with a vengeance.”

The following letter, from Mr. Ironside of Sheffield, has been alluded to in the ‘Memoir,’ and will be read here with interest, as an explanation of the above letter:—

“*Sheffield, June 23rd, 1850.*

“MY DEAR JANUARY,

“I was on intimate terms with Elliott when he wrote me the letter in 1834. Its roughness was caused in the following

manner. Owen had been here lecturing in favour of the National Regeneration Society: Elliott heard him. A committee was formed, which met at my house. At one meeting, Elliott produced a memorial to Owen, a beautifully done thing, with far more love in it than he could afford to objects of which he disapproved. He moved its adoption; tried hard; but, on a division, was floored. He and the minority signed it and published it in *The Iris* for February, 1834. I have recently read it, and trust it will be exhumed when his life is written. He told me, with some displeasure, that he should have carried it in the committee but for me. On its publication, the central committee wrote me, and old Pitkethly, of Huddersfield, came, and we agreed to send Elliott a challenge to meet Condy, a Manchester barrister, in public discussion on the subject. I did so, and in my letter told him that he would run no risk of expenses, as we (meaning the Sheffield committee) would guarantee him as we had plenty of money. It had been subscribed by ourselves, not given. He was so fairly and fully met, that his ire was roused, and he wrote me as you see, making a dishonest use of what I had said. What you knew of him would teach you that he was an unscrupulous opponent where free trade was concerned: we soon got round again, however. I cannot concentrate my mind to read much, but I read your book. Perhaps my love of the man was one reason. On the whole, I think you have given a fair description of him. The personal sketches are very graphic and life-like. I was with you throughout your described visit. The dog, and the canary which hopped from my head to his and back, the mound, the common, woods, etc., all were as familiar as possible. I saw him vividly when ridiculing mesmerism. He was not truthful where his prejudices or free trade were concerned. He never would admit that you had any power over him, although his wife and daughters assured me it was so; but they did not like to irritate him. You have hit the striking inconsistency in his character. As a man, he wept for the miseries of the poor, and would have done anything for them; as a political economist, he left them to its mercy. Towards his later years, he began to see that free trade was not the only gospel. He would admit this inferentially in conversation, while, at the same time, he would be writing as furiously as ever in its favour, and mauling anything not in strict accordance with his

notion of it. In my reply to his letter criticising 'England the Civilizer,' I told him that the principle of trade therein embodied was far superior to his 'Fair exchange of positive surplus, value for value.' This, I told him, was *fair* trade, and was preferable to *free* trade.

"He saw communism arising inevitably, and was enraged that he could not stop it. He told me not to be surprised if I heard of him burning the Bible, because its principles were essentially communistic.* His wife has frequently begged of me not to discuss with him, as it excited him, and he could not bear it. I used to retreat under shelter of a headache, which he regarded as a proof that he had silenced me, although my obstinacy would not allow me to be convinced.

"On the appearance of 'Bully Idle's Prayer,' Goodwyn Barmby wrote an answer in the same style, commencing thus:—

'Lord send Elliott his reason.'

Barmby wished me to get it inserted in *The Independent*, where the 'Prayer' had first appeared. Leader declined. So did *The Times*. I went to Houghton, intending to have it out there. On reading it to the wife and daughters they earnestly begged that I would not read it to him. I did not like to give it up, but could not withstand their entreaties. I eventually gave it to Dr. Watts to get it in *The Manchester Examiner*. They however, declined, and it has not yet been published."

"Yours right truly,

"January Searle."

"ISAAC IRONSIDE."

"Great Houghton, 29th September, 1847.

"DEAR SIR,

"Your favour of the 21st instant, with your correspondent's article on 'Railways and Bullionism,' reached me in a parcel from Sheffield on the 28th instant, and my house being full of visitors, I cannot give it at present the consideration which the vast importance of the subject demands. But I have attentively read the paper, and find that the writer is wrong from beginning to end. An issue of the stuff, which he is pleased to call money, might increase

* This was one of Elliott's extravagances. He would not have burnt George Sand's 'Consuelo,' much less the Bible.

Railway speculation, and would enable some speculators to get out of their dirt-holes; but it is capital—not what is called money—that is wanted to complete railways. A few years ago, railways offered the only feasible investment for surplus capital in food-taxed Britain; but so slowly was that surplus produced, that even the Midland was executed with difficulty. Yet now, when the comparative safety with which accommodation bills, endorsed by Joint Stock Banks, can be *re-discounted*, has facilitated undue speculation, he would increase the evil! He talks, too, of one pound notes *circulating* with sovereigns! Can you tell me where the sovereigns would be found, and at what price purchasable in six months after the appearance of the notes? I can tell you who would take good care of them, and sell them at a profit (30 per cent. perhaps), especially if Tony Lumpkins' cousins wanted (what they always want) a foreign war. Thank God, the notes would not do much throat-cutting out of Britain! It is painful to think that the only use he makes of his free trade argument is to sustain a sham. Now free trade means 'Something for Something,' but accommodation bills, if receivable by the tax-gatherer (which is all that your friend's security implies), means an increase of taxation! and finally, 'Nothing for Something,' as poor Louis the Sixteenth's red necklace dimly proved. But the fact suggests a very important question."

"Great Houghton, 20th September, 1848.

"DEAR SIR,

"I shall never be able to repay your kindness. You have behaved like a father to me, and whenever I speak of you in future my speech shall be in this wise, 'Our father Ironside!'

"I have delayed answering your favour of the 10th August, in the hope that I should have good news to tell you, and give my opinion of 'England the Civilizer,' the brave, wise, and most tolerant authoress of which extraordinary book deserves and shall have a re-perusal before I presume to pronounce on its merits. (! !)

"If you can spare the bath please place it at my debit, as it will be useful to my family. I ceased to use it on Saturday last. It has driven the blood, accumulated by the straining, from the seat to the back, whence I hope the constitution will be able to distribute it through the system. I shall recover I am told. The truth is, I improve desperately. I suffer great pain, and after losing more

than twenty-eight pounds in weight, I continue to lose weight at the rate of about one pound weekly. You cannot fatten calves in that way. If I am not removed suddenly, I shall last till April next.

"I wish to be buried in my skin at the foot of Lord Galway's ash tree here; my folks are all for holy ground and costs. Rotherham churchyard being full of corruption, and one of our clergymen happening to be here, I have been trying to bargain with him for a grave at Darfield. Could you think it? Sinking the offal, it will cost ten shillings for the use of the ground alone.

"If you know any poor devil who meditates rusticide (or death by living in the country), kill him with his granted wish; sell him the estate you have bought. Though as a country residence near Sheffield, it must be dog-cheap at the price you are to pay for it, you will not like it. The approach to it is a *thoroughfare crossing your threshold!* If you have bought the rising ground beyond the wall, in front of the cottage, you may enclose a portion for lawn, etc., and so remove the road a few yards from you, and be able, right and left, to see approaching rascalry, which will be a great satisfaction! Help-seeking friends, also, will visit you, under pretence of seeing Wiming, and desolation beyond it; but you will not be able to say, with the earnestness of the smoke-dried rhymer:—

" 'I thank ye, billows of a granite sea,
That the bribed plough, defeated, halts below!
And thanks, majestic Barrenness, to thee,
For one grim region in a world of woe,
Where tax-grown wheat, and paupers will not grow.'

"I have before me a wood-cut of great George (the man!) Stephenson. The expression of the countenance is more than beautiful—almost divine, godlike in its calm and thoughtful simplicity. If Phidias had left us such a head and face of Jupiter, the world would never have tired of praising it.

"Remember us to your excellent wife; and if you see sweet sister Kate, tell her she will hear from me in a few days."

" *Great Houghton, 20th November, 1848.*

"DEAR SIR,

"I return you three books, and show my gratitude by advising you to lend no more. At Sheffield I made it a rule to

lend the book that instructed me. When I came hither, intending to use my books, I found that I had lent and lost the very books which I most wanted.

"I have been much pleased with the 'Irish Lyries,' and am a thought richer for reading them, having contrived to steal a thought from one of them without robbing the author.

"I hardly know whether Henry Sutton's book* or Fanny Wright's is the more extraordinary. May they ever continue to be singular exhibitions of talent, labouring to be absurd! He, I am happy to believe, will not be able to make man in the image of his conceit, nor she in that of her bigotry.

"Puzzled by 'England the Civilizer,' I gave it, I am sorry to say, a second and very careful reading. Two-thirds of it, at least, consist of wearisome repetitions; explanations which do not explain; and pompous truisms not worth asserting. She exchanges one word for another, and thinks she has *done* something. Instead of government, she says, we are to have administration—government using *things*, and administration *men*; what the latter are to use, except *things*, I cannot see. The only point that she proves is, that (not England but) Italy, has been the civilizer; and she repudiates the only power that ever did, or can improve the condition of mankind; that power, whose last invented tool—the rail—has done more in ten years for the emancipation of the human race, than unaided agriculture (which means finger-grubbing for pig-nuts) could in ten thousand."

"Great Houghton, 2nd January, 1849.

"DEAR SIR,

"A plague on all your houses! Your Hall of Science, your Chapel of Jabez, your Church of Peter, your House that Jack built, and the House that Martin stole. The result of Neddy's generalship will be a 6s. duty. For this end, (affirming the deadly principle of protection,) the monopolists have retained the 1s. duty. That duty—though as a revenue duty it will only produce £400,000 a year, even if our yearly imports are 8,000,000 of quarters—will be a class-tax of £2,500,000 a year, and consequently a 6s. duty

* It is but right to add here, that Elliott afterwards acknowledged he had been unjust to Sutton.

will be a similar tax of £15,000,000. Lord, have mercy on us, or, ere long, England will be (for years to come) from sea to sea, a sea of blood and fire. Why fight a battle, useless if won—and if lost, fatal?”

“Hargate Hill, Barnsley, 5th Oct., 1849.

“DEAR SIR,

“I thank you for your favour of the 2nd, covering the balance of account to 30th Sept. last, £20 2s. 6d.

“Though I despise the nonsense of Communism, think not that I despair of man’s federation. No, brother! read, as I have done, (for I have had the honour of reading the proof sheets,) in, I believe, the forthcoming number of the ‘Westminster Review,’ an article on ‘Human Progress,’ one of the most eloquent and encouraging productions ever written. The author is, perhaps, our greatest living mechanician, (and certainly one of our greatest living benefactors of his kind) a Communist, worthy of any good cause.

“In his choice of an habitation he has proved the adaptability of communal principles to individual taste. Living in the kernel of London, he breathes a pure atmosphere, commanding from his windows perhaps the grandest and loveliest prospect in the world; and with all the advantages of the highest civilization, within a few yards around him, enjoys (for to him it is enjoyment) the absolute solitude of an anchorite! He lives on the eighth and highest landing of a huge pile of buildings, a portion of the roof of which is his yard: the infinite blue kisses his noble forehead; and beneath him flows the Thames, with its universe of life and motion.

“If you will contrive to quote the above at a public meeting, you will advertise the book, and give the good cause a shove; for all your ‘shorts’ are reported—I grieve to find you spinning long yarns.

“I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

“EBENEZER ELLIOTT.”

The four next letters were addressed to Mr. Paul Rodgers of Sheffield.

"Hargate Hill, near Barnsley, 23rd Jan. 1849.

"DEAR PAUL RODGERS,

"You know Mark Gregory, then? You cannot know a better man. And so the son is gone before the sire. Well, it lifts me up to learn that he left love and means sufficient to bring his poor remains home for interment. Then God speed your 'Word for the Poor.' But why the poor? Nay, they are the rich! the richest!

"Your song is very pleasing, and if it will sing, you ought to crow! I cannot write anything that will sing, because, I am told, *I will not* suffer each succeeding stanza to be like the preceding in rhythm. But the truth is, head-work is not heart-work.

"I think I have written some poems here which excel all my published doings. The last and best is a long narrative, or rather only a part of one, yet in itself complete. I have a capital knack of writing poems in three parts, and leaving two of them unbegun; the day of epics having gone by, and an abortive epic being the very thing I will not do. The scene is at Conisbrough, many centuries before the Christian era. I have taken the liberty to suppose that the Vale of Don and Dar, from Wath to Cadeby, was then a lake, with a little Niagara at the east end.

"Give my respects to Mrs. R. and to all your family, and to John Fowler, our son 'by better ties than blood.' I suppose he is by this time John Fowler, Esq. Never mind. I shall touch my hat to him, as I did to Jemmy Teapot, who nodded *not* again. To be sure, I had told him that he would go the *carriage-road* to God.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"Hargate Hill, near Barnsley, 24th Aug. 1849.

"DEAR SIR,

"My master-critic says, 'your narrative has no characters, unless your Derbyshire emigrant is a character; and if he is, his dialect is his character. The story, however, is not, she thinks, less true to nature on that account; for, in her opinion, sacks stuffed with straw, if they could talk, and were numbered 1, 2, 3, or 3, 2, 1, might pass for men, as well as nineteen-twentieths of the human beings we meet with. If so, Carlyle is right, and we must

wait not for circumstances, but the man, who is to make and be them." You've nae sic cricket i' your town.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 15th July, 1848.*

"DEAR SIR,

"It is a comfort to see again this hand-writing. To meet the writer, and the friends named, in Wentworth Park, would be a greater blessing still; but it is not to be. Not that it might not easily be. I should only have to take a teaspoonful or two of laudanum; but I should suffer great pain afterwards—to say nothing of the horrid 'black-drop muddle.'

"My present disease (the only serious one I ever had) is imputed to the influenza, which again and again attacked me some months ago. I believe it commenced before I left Sheffield. The feeling of suffocation which generally followed my speechifying there, was premonitory of it, and of the slow breaking up of my constitution. It will end either in apoplexy or consumption.

"You say nothing how you and Fowler are, and what you are doing or meditating. No evil, I am sure. Has he left the Institution?

"My 'People's Anthem,' it seems, is printed. I wrote it at the request of one of Mr. Willowby Wood's brothers, who said he would set it to music. Perhaps 'People's Doings' have changed his mind. He suggested alterations essential to the tune; and I send you a corrected copy in the hope that Mr. Leader will print it for the note's sake.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"*29th July, 1848.*

"KIND APOSTLE,

"Do not suppose that you always go without me on your excursions: 'I inherit your wanderings, and am still.' Might I recommend to you, for a *week-day out*, a visit, by rail, to the Etherow Viaduct? On to Dunwell, that you may know what barrenness is, and be thankful!

"Thank Mr. Fowler for me; but I did not fear that he or you would forget me.

"The wording of my 'Home of Taste' might justify *The Daily News* in their interpretation. They have, however, misunderstood me. I did not mean to *give* the workman a Home of Taste, but to let him *earn* one; *permission* to do so being really all that is wanted. And this brings me back to the note appended to my 'People's Anthem,' in *The Independent*: it does not say all that I ought to have said. Add as follows, after me, whenever you have an opportunity; never mind whose thoughts they are—I would fain atone for original sin before I die:—

"'The right to vote for members of parliament is founded on property and knowledge, that property and knowledge which every self-sustained person possesses in the labour and skill which enable him or her to live; and taxation and representation ought to be co-extensive, because *taxes are paid by self-sustained persons alone*. The pauper, be he palaced or hovelled, pays no taxes; the murderous protectionist, be he voter or legislator, none. Little knows the latter, if he is rich, for whom and what he has been an impoverisher; and woe be to him and his appropriations, if his folly and wickedness are to be much longer misruling forces.'

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

The following letters, addressed to the Author of this volume, will explain themselves, although nothing but an anxious desire to place Elliott truly and faithfully before the public could have induced him to publish them.

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 29th July, 1848.*

"DEAR SIR,

"In the land of palaces and jails, where poverty is a crime, I would not say to everybody what I am about to tell you. If I could well make ends meet, you would not need to ask me to subscribe for your book.* I should have done so already, for you have

* The book alluded to is called "Essays, Poems, Allegories, Fables; with an Elucidation and Analysis of the 'Bhagavat Geeta.'" John Chapman, Strand, London.

been heard of, even in this wilderness; but I ought not to afford it, and the book itself would bear witness against me. I could drink a glass of rum in the city of cornstacks, and fear no informer; but your book would remain with me, and say as plainly as words could, 'This fellow, who is indebted to his butcher for two months' meat, has expended 10s. in silent conversation with the best thoughts of January Searle, thirty miles hence.' It would enlarge this 'cloud of witnesses,' this assembly of souls, (blessed companions, who never quarrel with me, and never mean to betray me, though they betray,) this library—which must have cost my poor family at least twenty pounds.

"Should we ever 'grip fists,' (which is not likely,) the 'knuckle sparks' will hardly be mine, for my hand is all but that of a corpse.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 6th Aug. 1848.*

"DEAR SIR,

"Do not despond: think nothing impossible if your handwriting can be read: what a d——d inconceivable, unfathomable autogulph it is!

"The railway speculation will absorb every spare penny for some time to come; and the publishing trade is always the last to mend; but it will mend. I have written a volume of far better verse than any I have printed; and though I am notorious, if not famous, I doubt whether I could at present find a publisher who would risk it, and divide profits. But verse has now absolutely no reading public. You are wise in mixing prose with your verse. I would have done so, and it would have been of some use, if I could have prevailed upon Tait to be of my opinion. I know nothing of his successors. I lately sent them some verses of the politico-economical species, (which you know will not keep;) whether they printed them or not, I don't know.

"I have always eggs, bacon, and a spare bed, and should be glad to see you, if you could come and stop a day or two, though I should be poor company. Don't come if you mean to hurry away again in a few hours.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

*Great Houghton Common, near Barnsley,
23rd August, 1848.*

“DEAR SIR,

“Every work of art ought to tell its own story. If it need explaining, the artist has to that extent failed. And as you particularly allude in your Eclogue* to one lady only, the words ‘her’ and ‘she’ must, in strict construction, apply to that lady. Therefore when it receives your final corrections, you should inform the reader that not the matron but a maiden sat for the portrait which you have so beautifully painted.

“I have read ‘The Gala’ with great delight, and if I ever come your way, I will endeavour to see Kirklees. What is the name of the nearest station?

“I know not whether I like best your prose or your verse. In both you are often remarkably felicitous.

“In the second sentence of your preface I find a slight inaccuracy, two other errors in page 17, and a fourth in page 27. I mention these trifles, because ‘the country’s eyes *is* on us.’

“Instead of stating what was not true, you should have apostrophized your absent friend, and said, ‘How happy he would have been to be with you, and you to see him.’

“Your comparison of the Institute with the old monasteries is grand as the sleep of the latter.

“I have heard of one ‘Pan,’ and I think I see a pair of ‘young rogue’s eyes’ asking if he was a fiddler? Your mention of him reminds me of an incident in the life of a mayor of Doncaster, who had received a letter from the then prime minister, Lord Shelburne. ‘Shelburne! Shelburne! I don’t know him. Shelburne! Shelburne! He buys no bread at *my* shop.’

“Verse ought to be equal, as language, to the best prose.

‘Unfather’d, save by him and God in heav’n,’

though bad, would be better than

‘All fatherless, save God in heav’n and him.’

“Can false natural history be true poetry? Flowers burn, and

* This poem is called “The Rectory in the Vale of Trent,” and is included, as all the other pieces are to which Elliott alludes in these letters, with the exception of the “Gala,” in the “Essays” published by Chapman.

are cool. I am not aware that I ever saw the hyacinth, violet, kingcup, primrose, and harebell, blooming together. You may think I like to find fault. Never with fools. I think you are capable of doing the true, and I therefore exercise on you the pedant's privilege. But your philosophy is as mischievous as your natural history is incorrect. He 'who pays wages for work,' has not, on that account, any right to rule his fellow-men. The paid and the payer are *quits*. By one act good is done to two parties, and evil to nobody. You a hater of tyranny! and teaching the doctrines of a slave! If your wish is to instruct the rising race, I can—but that I fear to offend you—name a book that might teach you the A B C of your business, the Corn Law Catechism; a book that contains more thought than any other book of this century. Still, and for ever (with such books unread) shall the people's teachers continue to be, like Cobbett and Howitt, all fingers and no wrist?

"There is power in your lines which associate the localities of Robin Hood's life with his grave: they exemplify the fusing power of genius, and I have seldom read sweeter poetry than your reflections on the graveyard of the convent; but—and I hardly know why—I don't like the word 'promiscuous.' Nor can I bid you good bye, without blackballing 'Æolus.' The devil take him, and all the breed of him, including his relations 'Nimp' and 'Dryhead.'* If they were otters or badgers I could understand them. And the devil take all comparisons that do not illustrate, or (better still,) demonstrate something, like Colonel Thompson's. Read him, you b—ch, *if you would be Amazonian*.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

* "I beg pardon of these folks. 'Nymph' and 'Dryad' is the proper spelling."

"Great Houghton Common, 26th Aug. 1848.

"DEAR SIR,

"In criticising any poem, really such, I could find in my heart to be hypercritical; because, while fearing that poetry has seen her best days, I am unwilling to conclude that her days are numbered, and that the 'old melody' will soon be heard no more for ever. Living in an age of poetical unbelief—and which boasts

that it has outlived the 'artifice of verse'—we ought to have faith in a precept of old Isaac Walton's, which applies equally to verse-making and angling. 'When you use your worm,' said he, 'put him on the hook as if you loved him.' So he who, in these days, professes to write poetry, should write it as if he were writing for his life. Yet I could point out in your poem, lines which are not verse of any kind. You, I doubt not, wrote them with a purpose. But I have no faith in what are called imitative verse: consonantal English is harsh in itself: to write musically is our bow of Ulysses. Do not, however, misunderstand me. Your versification usually *sings* your thoughts well.

"The paid and the payer, you admit, are quits; and yet you talk of the payer's 'mastership;' a heresy too widely believed to need inculcating, and which must be abjured if either of the parties is to be a man. If neither of them is to be a man, I can understand why one of them is to luxuriate, or wallow in the insolence of condescension, at the expense of the others.

"I requested my daughter, at Sheffield, to look at your piano, and she writes me, in reply, that her brother has given £20 for a new one, on which she is practising.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 2nd Sep. 1848.*

"DEAR SIR,

"Late events seem to be verifying your prediction 'that Germany has an important mission to fulfil in the world.' The authoress of 'England the Civilizer' has also risked some predictions which have already received startling confirmation.

"I don't like your 'Bridge of Death.' When you sat down to write it, you were in search of a great victim for execution. So, you said mentally, 'Dilly, dilly, duckling, come and be killed!' It came, alas! and frightful work you made of it. I know nothing like it but Frank Alsop's sermon, when he preached before the blazing tar-barrel. 'Terrible work! Woe to the wicked! None of your works! None of your works! Damn your works! Free grace is all.'

"You never, I am sorry to say, write lines of ten syllables pronounced in the time of *nine*. The effect of such lines is always bad, and no precedents can make it otherwise. Lines of eleven syllables pronounced in the time of ten, have often a good effect, as the following line from Gray, and your general practice prove:—

‘Full many a flower is born to blush unseen.’

Here the words ‘many a’ form a dactyl—three syllables pronounced in the time of two. Of all arts and mysteries there is scarcely one that requires so long an apprenticeship as this beggarly trade of poetry; and you are an envious villain for having learned it so well.

"But, Lord be thanked, you are not faultless. I defy you to make verse of any kind, by any scanning, of any one of these lines from ‘The Gala’:—

‘With the great glad blessedness of knowledge.’

‘Honest John, plain-spoken as a bell.’

‘Lies stained with coloured fire in the sun.’

This last is a line of nine syllables, pronounced in the time of ten. The effect is that of offering a fourpenny-bit for sixpence.

"I am, dear Sir, your much gratified faultfinder,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 11th Sept. 1848.

"DEAR SIR,

"I have seldom read better prose than your essay on ‘Prayer and Other Things.’ It is more poetical than any of your mounted poetry that I have yet seen. And in my cabbage book, (I am naturally a tailor,) ‘formality is selfishness on stilts,’ stands at your credit. Lord, if that book were fairly posted, what a tale it would tell about the originalities of—you know who!

"‘Long, long ago,’ (perhaps fifteen years,) when food-taxing and much-mortgaged Chandos, (grieved to see anything eatable escape his maw,) had been accusing his victims of luxurious living and want of forethought, I prayed aloud in the presence of eight or ten thousand Sheffielders, in Paradise Square assembled, ‘That he might live to know what it is to be poor.’ Though a murmured, yet sublime ‘Amen’ responded to me, persons present, (and afterwards persons not present,) called me ‘monster!’ with the

saving clause of, 'if not madman.' But God heard my prayer. I then ought not to say that supplications, addressed immediately to him, are useless. The following, however, is my creed, and it probably differs little from your own: 'The only true, because the only useful prayer, is that which human beings, (after vainly doing their best for themselves,) address to their fellow creatures for assistance. *And it justifies begging!* unless desperate people are to be forced on that awful, and sole remaining alternative, which they have full the same right to use, that a drowning man has to catch at a straw.'

"Your constant teaser,

"EBENEZER, C.L.R."

"*Hargate Hill, near Barnsley, 5th Oct. 1848.*

"DEAR SIR,

"As an ultimate corrective of blunders, I have written an account of my boyhood and youth—say a history of the education of my mind—and made a present of it. Of course I could not comply with your request, without destroying the value of the gift. But if you like you may speak of me thus: 'Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymer, a poet of the people if ever they had one, was born at Masbrough, in March, 1781. He is the second son of a commercial clerk, who had eleven children, and a salary of £70 a year. The bard, when a boy, was so dull, or so inattentive, that at last he was thought incapable of learning anything at school. After being sent to two schools, with little or no result, he was allowed to have pretty much his own way. To this circumstance he attributes any merit he may have displayed. Thrown on himself, he learned to think for himself; and in God's good time saw the necessity of educating himself. His merit, such as it is, is his own, for, says he, I earned it; and I have heard his wife say that he has to thank himself only for all that he knows. His laziness never could learn grammar; but he can correct inaccurate language by reflection; and he thinks he writes better English than some people who teach Latin. There is nothing remarkable in his personal appearance, except, perhaps, his gentle manners. He has neither a shoulder like a leg of mutton, nor a hinder-end broader than a blacksmith's bellows. He is five feet seven inches high, and slimly rather than strongly made. His eyes, dim and pale, kindle wildly

sometimes. His features are harsh, but expressive and not unpleasant. On the whole, he is just the man, who if unknown, would pass unnoticed anywhere.'

"Say for my book what you can, and for or of me the less the better. People are dog sick of the topic.

"I still suffer great pain, and lose a pound in weight weekly. If not removed suddenly by this dizziness, or by this fluttering, I shall last till April.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 7th Oct. 1848.

"DEAR SIR,

"What you have to say of me will not be complete without this addition, which you can use or not:—'He is a politician and a poet. With his politics, you know, I have here nothing to do. Poets, you also know, are usually people who having expressed in verse thoughts not fit or not good enough for prose, get pensioned, or die in the workhouse. It is a real distinction to the Corn Law Rhymer, that in his grey hairs, and in the land of palaces and workhouses, he is not either a pauper or a pensioner. Tired and comparatively poor, but self-sustained, like one who after hard labour reaches his home and rests, he sits on his own hill-top.'

"Yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"Hargate Hill, near Barnsley, 13th Nov. 1848.

"DEAR SIR,

"Though I am becoming great in the peg line, having lost two front teeth since last Wednesday, I think I could yet make your 'Discourse on Plutarch' tell in a Mechanics' Hall. Oh, that I were conditioned to recite it, Roary O'Thunder, before a thousand radicals! I have read it to Mrs. E. and my younger daughter, who both say they know not when they had such a treat before. It is indeed a noble oration. I greatly like your style. None of your sentences are too long; and your short ones give time to breathe. Some of your passages are perfect music. *Verse to the devil, then! you can write prose. But can you afford such compositions?*

"I have, so far, kept my carcass out of the cask filled with the black droning stingers, that eat the honey of all workers, and poison what they do not devour.

"I have quoted from the letter of a lady-friend a passage very like one of yours, in my preface to a poem, or rather trilogy, in twelve books, of which the first part in four books is finished and complete in itself. Whether I proceed or not with the remaining two parts, I shall want defenders; for the action is placed in eldest time, and yet the characters, etc., I am told, are rather modern; but I think with you, 'that he who speaks truly to one age, speaks truly to all ages.' Shall I do this into verse?

'He truly to all ages speaks,
Who truly speaks to one.'

"I have lost five pounds since I weighed last, and am now just ten pounds heavier than cuckold's weight.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"Hargate Hill, 20th March, 1849.

"DEAR SIR,

"I said in my heart, 'Where is he? Surely the city of counties, the swallower of giants, hath gobbled him up, and evermore to be forgotten by him is the lone hill and its grasshopper.'

"Come when you may, you will be welcome here, and I hope I need not say how glad I shall be to see you if, when you come, I am in the land of the living.

"I rejoice to hear that you are progressing. Who is Troup? Tait's editor? As I see neither Tait's nor Blackwood's Magazine, let me know when anything of yours appears in either, and I will buy the number.

"We have not seen the second part of the Banquet of Plutarch; but we have been contrasting your prose style with that of a writer in 'The North British Review,' who seems determined to burst his readers with his long-winded sentences, and interminable wordiness.

"Of an epic in three parts, each complete in itself, to be called respectively 'Etheline,' 'Konig,' and 'Telmerine,' I have finished the first part in four books. I mean it to form portion of a volume of prose and verse which I am preparing for the press; but, alas!

in such discredit is political honesty, that I doubt whether I shall be able to find a publisher, even on the principle of sharing profits.

"One of my daughters-in-law, going to the West Indies, said to me, 'Write me a song.' So I said I would, and I did do. You live in the land of 'Great Sings.' If it will sing tell me. You say nothing of your lecture on the Greatest Goose.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

MARY.

TUNE—*Long ago.*

I.

"SING her a song of the white-headed one,
Gone, gone before! Gone, gone before!
Sing to her tears of the Sire who is gone!
When to come more? Never more!
Heart-breaking sea, when she weepeth alone,
Tell his sad child that the white-headed one
Went to the grave blessing her who was gone,
Wide, wide waves o'er! wide waves o'er!

II.

Now sighs the widow unto the lone sea,
'Bring her again! Bring her again!
Sea, let the sad find a true friend in thee!
Bring her again! Soon again!'
Wild was the parting, but may there not be
Tears which are blissful? when sings the old sea,
'Mother and child, thank the good God for me:
Meet, meet again! Meet again.'"

"Hargate Hill, Barnsley, 30th March, 1849.

"DEAR SIR,

"*Easter Sunday at latest—and dinna forget.*

"Your 'Ballad History of the Norman Conquest' gives me a higher conception of your poetical likelihood than anything else of yours that I have seen. It proves you to be a poet. But our

noble fourteen syllable line, which young bards chirp instinctively (though there is 'thunder on its tongue' capable of earthquake impression, yet,) having but two notes (B and C) would be intolerably tiresome in a long poem. The first part of my three-in-one poem is written in a ballad measure, or rather in *ballad measures*; the longest lines containing nine syllables. But I purpose to write the second part in our heroic Iambic, rhyming irregularly, (and not at too long intervals,) running the lines into each other, as the most eloquent of poets does in the fourth canto of his 'Childe.'

"I am, dear Sir, yours truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"*Hargate Hill, near Barnsley, 12th April, 1849.*

"DEAR SIR,

"I have tried all I know at Rotherham and Sheffield to get 'The Christian Teacher,' from which Mr. Howitt, in his 'People's Journal,' picked the pretty. It cannot be had at either of those places. But it was edited at Manchester by an Unitarian minister, and I think a letter to some Unitarian minister there or thereabouts, would procure you such numbers of it as relate to me. My best *cricket* (the angel of my hearth) having objected to the song I gave you, I enclose it, corrected by her.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

SONG.

I.

"DONOUGHT would have everything;
Eat the lark, and use its wings;
Sip the sweet, and be the sting:
Donought is the only king.

II.

Donought is an alchemist;*
Hencecock is a commuunist;

* Alchemist, or thief, he must be: or how does he live?

Idlehead is heavy-fist ;
Will's a rightline—with a twist.

III.

Hark ! the throstle ! what sings he ?
'Worm, my beauty, come to me !'
Yet all lovely things are free ;
Chain'd and happy ! can it be ?

IV.

See the daisies, how they grow !
When they list, the breezes blow :
Why can't weary man do so ?
All enjoy, and nothing owe ?

V.

'Mouth, keep open ! Eyes, be shut !'
Take no care for back or gut :
Best of women is the slut !
Hey for cattle, cook'd and cut !"

"Hargate Hill, near Barnsley, 22nd June, 1849.

"DEAR SIR,

"It is quite true that I have been so ill as to be scarcely able to say I was alive, and also true that laudanum must be making havoc of my intellectuals, if I did not answer your letters. Mentally, I am quite sure, I answered them, thanking you sincerely for them, and all your kindness ; but I can find no copy of my answer. How kind it is in you to think of a poor broken-down man like me ! You are close upon some of the finest scenery in England ; scenery which I have long purposed to see, and which I will see, if I live another year.

"Southey thought Gordale Scar finer than anything of the kind in Britain. Ingleborough ! Malham Tarn ! Malham Cove ! Kilnsey Pike ! all in a ring of twelve miles ! But the fall at Malham, 300 feet high, is worth seeing only after a heavy rain. Is Dr. Carlyle's residence in Huddersfield ? What is the price of his translation of Dante ? I will strain a point to buy it, if it is not very high.

Two and a half years ago, when I first sought medical aid, my disease was curable. I have discovered the cause of it—constriction of the great gut, threatening closure, and a death of torture. Talmer died of it, eight inches of the rectum having closed! It is now, perhaps, incurable, but mitigation is still possible, and such comparative relieve from pain as will allow me to prepare another volume for the press. You see what I am made of: I talk of myself. You think of me, and how you can serve me. God bless you.

"I am, dear Sir, yours truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"*Hargate Hill, 3rd July, 1849.*

"DEAR SIR,

"Alas, then, the water-cure does not cure you!!! Cold immersion would not cure me. Could you describe the process of water-cure? I have cold water here; better, none anywhere. But if I could get '*dacent*' I would try Scarborough.

"Both Tait and Bulwer have asked me to perform the task you set me. I never could set about it; and at the risk of being thought ungrateful, I must say that I much doubt the possibility of my writing a page of such composition, though I delight to read such. Nor, if able, could I wisely undertake any new tasks. There are three things which I ought to do, not one of which shall I be allowed to do—so I fear. I would fain write the two remaining parts of my epic, '*Eth-Kon-Tel*,' of which I read you the first part in four books. I would fain arrange my letters, papers, etc., for publication, if wanted, when I am gone. And I would fain prepare a new volume for the press. This last I am trying to do, but if I use the pen half an hour I suffer torments which I hope the damned do not suffer.

"They whose corn laws blessed the '*agricultural hills and valleys of Ilkley*' with weavers working sixteen hours for fivepence, did not create those hills and valleys; but they talk to us as if they did, and you believe them. Heaven help us!

"My son Frank is here, reading aloud your *Sketches of Huddersfield scenery*. But the scene itself is present with me.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

"Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 5th Sept. 1849.

"DEAR SIR,

"I should fear I had offended you if you came so near as Wentworth without calling on me. Seriously, I mean not to be complimentary when I say it, for it is true, we see so few humans here, that the devil would be welcome if he came, as I hope he will some day soon. Wentworth Castle is another most interesting place.

"I am, dear Sir, yours very truly

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."





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